

**By the Grace of
the Gods:
Volume 3**

Roy

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By the Grace of the Gods

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Roy

Illust. Ririnra

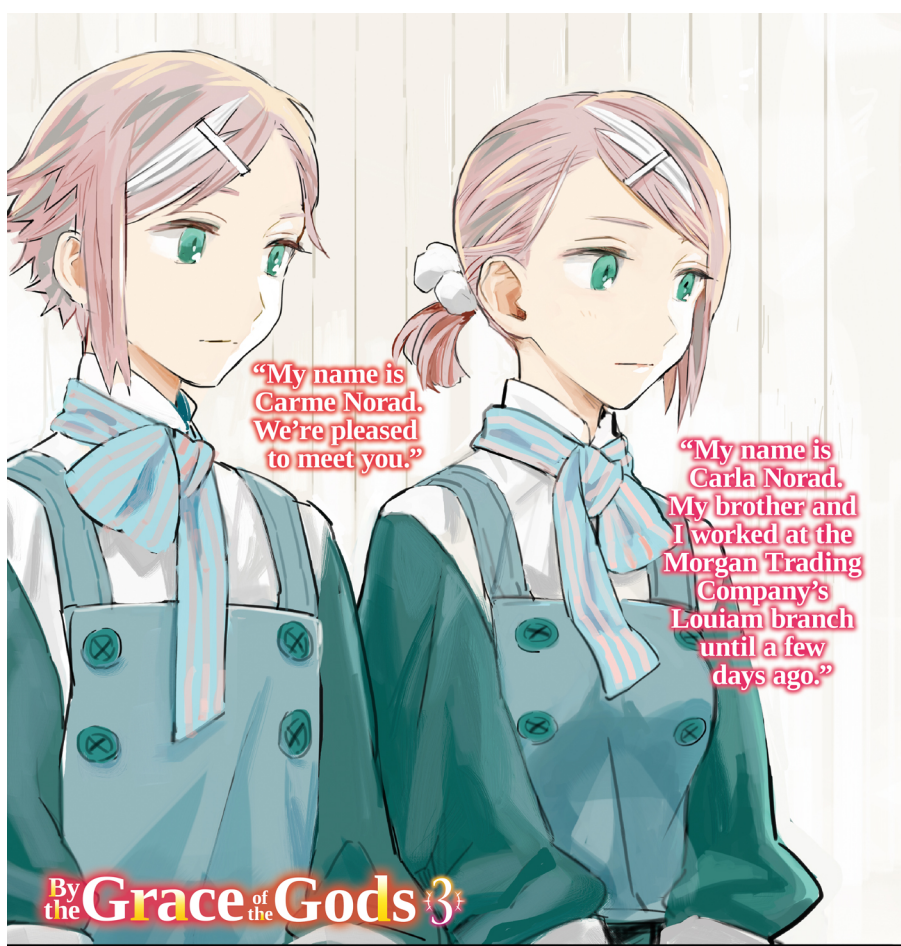


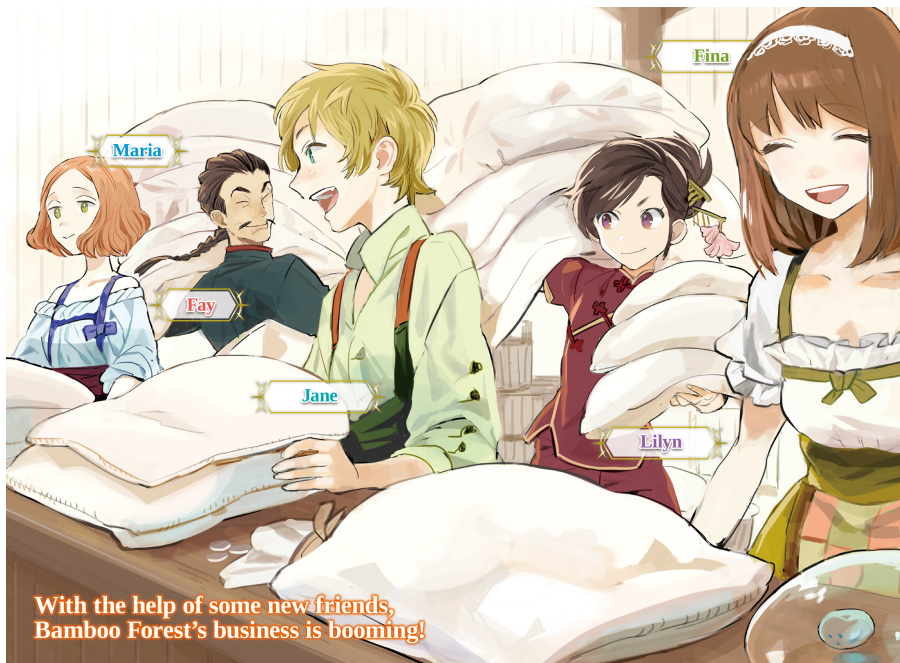
By the Grace of the Gods

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Roy
Illust. Ririnra







**“Look at
all these
beautiful
birds!”**

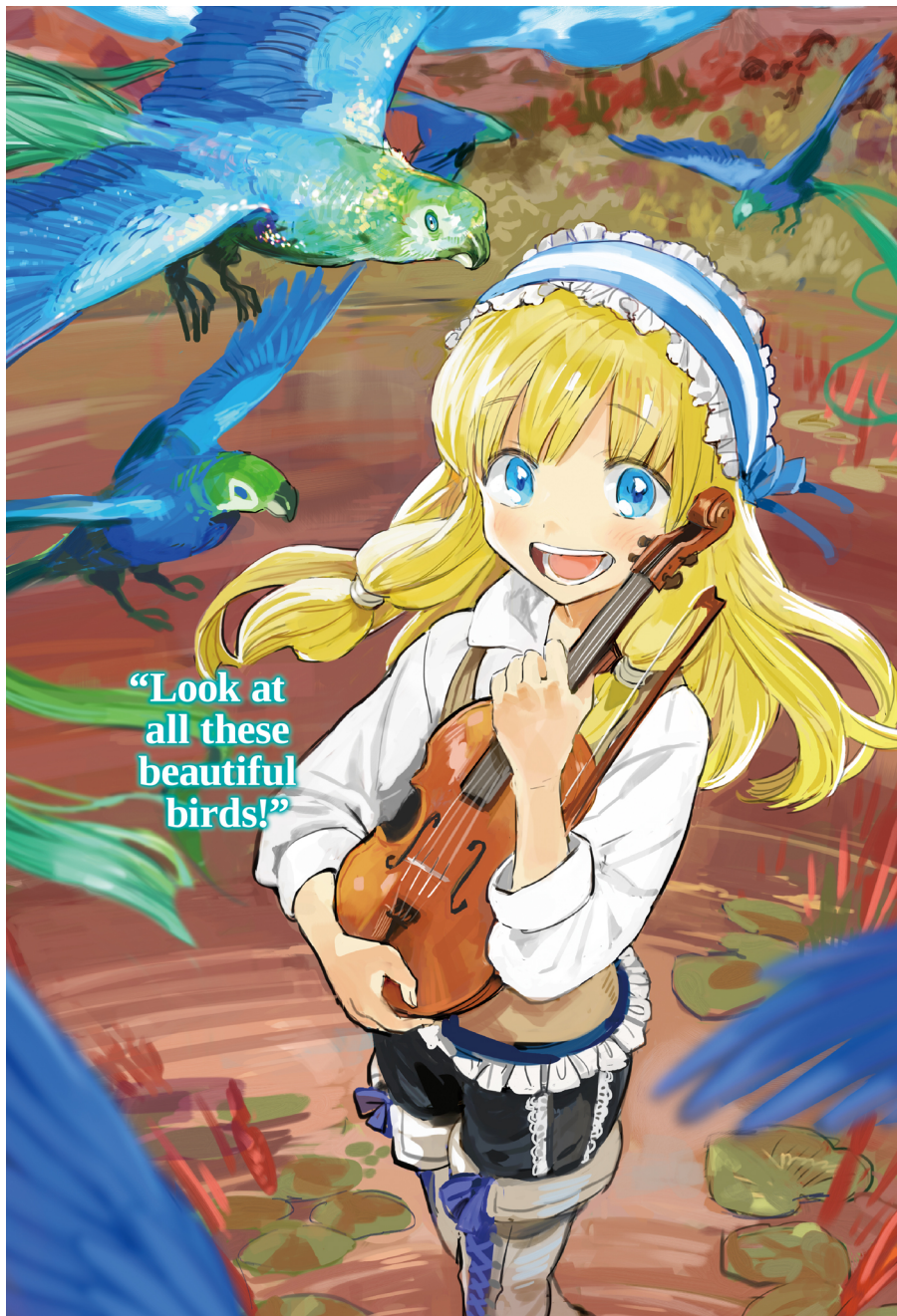


Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Chapter 2 Episode 26: A Meeting With Subordinates

Chapter 2 Episode 27: A Fun and Busy Banquet

Chapter 2 Episode 28: Opening Day

Chapter 2 Episode 29: Hiring

Chapter 2 Episode 30: Personnel Additions

Chapter 2 Episode 31: Working in the Abandoned Mine

Chapter 2 Episode 32: Slime Abnormality

Chapter 2 Episode 33: After Hours

Chapter 2 Episode 34: Nice Find

Chapter 2 Episode 35: Food Preparation

Chapter 2 Episode 36: Taming Magic

Chapter 2 Episode 37: Forced Break

Chapter 2 Episode 38: For Hiring Purposes

Chapter 2 Episode 39: Laying the Foundation

Chapter 2 Episode 40: The New Tamer

Chapter 2 Episode 41: Premonition

Chapter 2 Episode 42: Preparations

Chapter 2 Episode 43: To the Swamp

Chapter 2 Episode 44: Attempting a Contract

Chapter 2 Episode 45: The Day Before We Part (Part 1)

Chapter 2 Episode 46: The Day Before We Part (Part 2)

Chapter 2 Episode 47: In the Realm of the Gods

[Extra Story: The Ones Left Behind \(Part 1\)](#)

[Extra Story: The Ones Left Behind \(Part 2\)](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Short Stories](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

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Chapter 2 Episode 26: A Meeting With Subordinates

Day 12

Before noon, a carriage slowly proceeded through Gimul. It was occupied by Glissela, Pioro, and Serge of the Merchant's Guild. There was also Taylor of the Tamer's Guild and two of Serge's subordinates, a twin boy and girl who were to be Ryoma's assistants.

"Now, I believe we're just about there?"

"Yes, past the corner a couple streets ahead."

Tension and anxiety hid in the two nearly identical faces. After what Serge said, they looked out the window. It all began a few days prior. They were working at a branch store in a town called Louiam when they received instructions from the main store to pass their work to someone else and come to Gimul. It was signed by Serge, the president of the company.

After that day, their promotion to the main store was celebrated, and they passed down their work as instructed and came to Gimul this morning. The weather delayed their arrival by a day, and when they got to the main store, they were told that they weren't to work there. Instead, they were to temporarily work for an 11-year-old boy with connections to the duke's family. Following that, they hastily headed to the store's opening party by changing into travel clothes and getting on the carriage. They were, of course, worried about this failure of management, as well as what exactly this boy who they presumed to be the son of an aristocrat had to do with anything. They were also prepared for the possibility that this job may determine their future.

"I see it. Here we are."

"Hohoh, looks like that kid did all right."

"This is one lovely store! It only took a week or so to build this?"

"Sister, look at this."

"...Yes."

The store was a simple building with white walls and a few windows, but it was surrounded by a well-maintained lawn and flower bed to give it a tidy appearance. The carriage's passengers got off and entered the store, where there were shelves that reached close to the ceiling, upon which there were four divine statues that drew attention.

The rest of the store gave off a soft, wooden feel, and there were glossy L-shaped counters. They were surprised by how complete the building turned out to be. Carme and Carla had an ounce of hope in the future of the bright building.

“Welcome to your local laundromat, Bamboo Forest!”

The boy who was to be the twins’ boss, and the greatest source of their anxiety, appeared. They gave him a close, judging look.

“Ryoma, thanks for inviting me here today. I’m so glad you even thought to include me!”

“Nice store you have here. It’s got a bright future ahead.”

“Congratulations on your grand opening.”

“Thanks, everyone.”

Ryoma greeted the guests with a smile. He looked like a meek, ordinary boy not fit to be a merchant. The twins thought his behavior matched his appearance, for better or worse. It would be nothing strange from an average child in the neighborhood, but for someone meant to be their boss, it raised fears for the difficulties soon to come. The world of business could be cruel. The twins were young, but they had worked for the company long enough to know the reality.

“Thank you for coming too, Mr. Smit.”

“Congrats. I didn’t think we’ve spoken since you registered, but then Reinbach told me about you.”

The boy cheerfully spoke to the leaders of two guilds and the heads of two companies. The twins saw this and looked at each other and knew what one another was thinking. This boy must have been the son of some aristocrat.

“Serge, who are they?”

“Oh, I forgot to introduce you. They will be your assistants.”

“I’m Carla Norad. My brother and I worked at the Morgan Trading Company’s Louiam Branch until recently.”

“I’m Carme Norad. We’re pleased to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too. I’m Ryoma Takebayashi.”

“These two may be young, but they served as the vice managers of the Louiam Branch. They’ve worked for the Morgan Trading Company for a long time, and you can trust them to do good work. I’m sure they’ll be of great help to you.”

“But...”

“Is something the matter?” both the twins asked in unison. Ryoma panicked and explained.

“You just sound like greater talent than I was expecting to get. There’s no problem from a business perspective. It’ll help to have some skilled employees on hand, but the job I was planning to give you isn’t that hard, so I don’t know if you’ll get to use your abilities to their fullest extent. That’s not to say that I don’t need you, though.”

Using such talent for nothing but carrying laundry and sitting at the reception desk might have been wasteful, but the already nervous twins reacted to Ryoma's explanation gravely. Serge sensed that something was off about their behavior.

"You two got a little too worked up, don't you think?"

"Ryoma! We're here!"

Just when Serge tried to calm the twins, eleven more men and women flooded through the entrance. They were from the Adventurer's Guild.

"Welcome to Bamboo Forest, your local laundromat! Come to this empty counter here, please."

"Hey, how's it— Ack! Why's the hag here?!"

"Who are you calling a hag?! I may be old, but I'm no hag! I swear, you've been the head of the Adventurer's Guild for a long time now, but you still have a rotten mouth, Worgan. It's always been the same with you."

"Do you have to drag up the past every time you see me?! Yeesh, how long do you think you can keep leading your guild, you stubborn old lady? Why are you here, anyway?"

"I was invited, obviously."

"Well, whatever. Ryoma, how am I supposed to ask for your services here?"

"One moment, please. Oh right, Carme, Carla, let me explain the work process for you. Come inside. The rest of you can come with too." Ryoma said, opened part of the counter, and ushered the six of them inside. "First, the customer needs to buy one of our exclusive bags. They cost twenty sute each. They can use the same bag every time they come to our store, so there's no need to make them buy another one each time."

"All right, then I'll take a bag. I just need to stuff my laundry in here, yeah?"

"Yes, and as thanks for going along with our employee training today, we'll wash your clothes for free. You can also have the bag as a bonus, so bring it with you next time you come."

"Thanks a bunch."

"So, Carme and Carla, it's your turn. After the customer pays you, you take these tablets with the corresponding prices and put them on these sticks on the right side of the counter," Ryoma explained, reached under the counter, and pulled out some thin, different-colored tablets with holes in them. At the same time, he pointed to the edge of the counter where there were sticks the perfect size for the tablets mounted in a stand.

"What's that?"

"A tool I came up with for calculating revenue. The bags we sell

come in three sizes: one that costs a medium bronze coin, one that costs a medium bronze coin and eight small bronze coins, and one that costs four medium bronze coins. When you accept a medium bronze coin for a small bag, take a black tablet and put it on the stick on the black part of the stand. There's space there for a hundred tablets. Once you reach a hundred, use a pen to write a tally on the paper under the stand, then return all the tablets to the shelf under the counter. Do this repeatedly throughout the day, and after the store closes, check the results to calculate our sales. For example, if records show that we filled up the black tablet space three times, and there are forty-two left on the stick, that means we received 342 medium bronze coins for small bags, coming out to 3420 sute. We charge for three different laundry options, three different bags, and a special armor and equipment-cleaning service for adventurers, making seven types of purchases in all. Check the results for each at the end of the day, and if you add it all up, I think it should make your daily revenue calculations easier. I also think it'll be nice to know how well everything sells individually, and how much demand there is for specific bag sizes. It'll take some testing to figure it out."

With that, Ryoma went off to greet Worgan. Meanwhile, the group from the Merchant's Guild were left to stare at this tool. Ryoma simply remembered how conveyor belt sushi restaurants in his past life calculated prices by the color of each plate the customer took, but in this world that didn't even have cash registers, it drew a lot of attention.

The literacy rate in this world was far lower than that of Japan, and a fair number of people even had trouble with basic arithmetic. It was especially glaring in small villages, but this tool only demanded charging the proper fee and following a set procedure to work as intended. If the time and place called for it, this would allow them to hire employees who couldn't do math. They could also use different measurements to apply a similar system to their own businesses. The five merchants realized the tool's potential, but Ryoma failed to notice their sharp stares as he continued to greet the customers.

"After they pay, take their bag of laundry, take one of these signs under the counter, and tie it to the string used to close the bag. Give the corresponding sign to the customer, and when it's time to give their laundry back, check the signs to see which bag is theirs," Ryoma explained, then walked up to a hole in the wall that looked like a garbage chute and tossed a bag in. "The room back there has a cleaner slime— Oh, I should talk about cleaner slimes."

"They eat filth. Mr. Morgan told me."

"Thank you, Carla. Then do either of you have any questions?"

"Regarding this new type of slime, will it actually clean the

clothes?" Carme asked right away. His sister was about to ask, but shut her mouth.

"Maybe it's hard to believe until you see it. Would anyone mind if I opened up their bag to demonstrate?"

"You can use mine," Jeff offered and tossed his bag over. Ryoma thanked him and showed the twins the bloodstains inside, then tied up the bag and put it in the hole.

"As soon as you throw something in here, orders are sent out to clean it and carry it to the next room, so it'll be cleaned automatically. Clean laundry will be left in a designated spot. Then you pick it up, check whose laundry it is, and return it to the customer. That's the gist of the job."

To reduce the risk of lost clothes and allow employees to focus on serving customers, the job was limited in scope. Employees never had to open the bags and fold the clothes. After a few seconds of explanation, Ryoma entered the other room and collected the washed clothes. He again opened the bag and demonstrated that the blood stains were gone without a trace.

"Can it actually clean any kind of filth?"

"It's worked on everything so far, but if you could check before you return their clothes, I think that would be for the best. If it's still dirty, have it washed again."

"Wouldn't dyed clothes lose their color?"

"I tested it on a cloth that used a plant-based dye, but the color remained. Maybe it depends on how fresh the dye is, I don't know. Warning the customer about that possibility before you take their clothes would be the safest option. Is there anything you don't understand about the process?"

"Not that I can think of right now," both twins said.

"I see. Tell me if anything happens, then. Why don't you split up and go serve the customers?" Ryoma suggested, prompting Carme and Carla to come to the counter as well. The three of them accepted the clothes from the nine remaining customers. Ryoma watched the twins out of the corner of his eye, relieved to find that they worked diligently. As long as they could do their job, that was enough. Ryoma and the twins took one steady step toward being coworkers. The twins' misunderstandings remained intact.

Chapter 2 Episode 27: A Fun and Busy Banquet

When the duke's family finally arrived, Ryoma led the twenty-nine guests inside.

"The employee area is past this point, so customers generally wouldn't be allowed inside. Employees have a changing room, parlor, offices, a break room, and a bathroom. There's also a small kitchen."

"Mind if we take a little look around?"

"Go ahead," Ryoma said and went through each room with the other twenty-nine following behind him. They were like the tourists in his previous world. They ended with the break room, after which he headed off to finish cooking and had them wait in the break room for a while.

As an aside, this was when Ryoma finally realized that he had called the duke's family, people of high status, for a personal gathering, an act that stretched the bounds of reason. He planned this gathering as thanks to them for all their help, and out of a yearning for the positive relationships he never had in his previous world, but after he reflected on the situation in the kitchen, he felt it may have been a hasty decision. Most of the adventurers were of a high rank too, but they didn't mind as much as Ryoma thought. Those who he left waiting were nervous, but calmly chatted with one another.



About ten minutes later, Welanna suddenly began to look antsy.

"Welanna? Something wrong?"

"I don't know what it is, probably Ryoma's cooking, but something smells delicious," Welanna said, provoking everyone to sniff the air, but nobody else noticed the odor except the other three beastkin and Asagi the dragonewt.

"Meow?! Now that you mention it, something smells tasty!"

"You're right."

"I don't smell a thing."

"It's probably a bit faint for human noses. Maybe only beastkin can smell it."

"No, I notice it as well. Might this be meat? Fragrant bread, perhaps? Either way, it smells scrumptious."

“That reminds me, Ryoma’s cooking is pretty good.”

“Is that so, Lord Reinhart?”

“Yes, he’s clever with even a small number of ingredients. His rabbit saute with giger root was delicious.”

“Master Ryoma does have Housekeeping Level 10, impressive for his age. I’m looking forward to this.”

“10 at his age is pretty good, yeah. Even with skills that are easy to level up, few people get that far before the age of 40.”

Five minutes later, Ryoma returned.

“Sorry about the wait. The food’s ready.”

“Oh meow, finally!”

“Took long enough! You’ve been making us wait here with nothing but that smell. You know how painful that was?”

“Oh, you smelled it? I put up an anti-odor barrier, though. Maybe it wore off before I finished.”

“Nevermind that. Food, please.”

“Understood.”

“Allow us to help,” Sebas, Araune, and Lilian said. Ryoma thanked them, and they all brought the dishes out together. For drinks, Ryoma ordered a slime to carry them over. Ryoma’s slimes behaved differently from the average slime, but Taylor and the five members of the Merchant’s Guild knew nothing of this, so they were shocked. The others explained to them.

In the meantime, more food and drinks were brought out. Once that was finished, Ryoma called for a toast.

“Ahem, thank you all for coming to celebrate the opening of my store. It’s nothing special, but I prepared plenty of food for everyone. Enjoy the meal. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” everyone shouted back. They all drank their alcohol at once, then Gordon loudly cheered.

“The hell’s this booze? Quality stuff!”

“It’s for a celebration, so I decided to splurge a bit.”

“What is it, exactly?”

“The owner of the liquor store said it’s called Jemis Fountain,” Ryoma answered. Gordon looked at his glass and grinned.

“Jemis Fountain?! I heard it was good, but never drank it before.”

“Really?”

“You bought it without knowing what it is? Every alcohol fanatic knows that Jemis Fountain’s world-class booze.”

“I had no idea. I only bought it because the liquor store owner recommended it.”

“What luck. Jemis Fountain’s relatively affordable, but it’s got so many fans that it sells out right quick.”

“I see, so I got lucky— Oh!”

"Is something the matter?"

"No, I just realized why I was able to get such good alcohol."

"There's a specific reason?"

"Yes, I was blessed by Tekun, the God of Wine."

"What?! Really?!"

"For real, kid?!" Ryoma's explanation got a big reaction out of Gordon and Pioro.

"Y-Yes, it's true. Why do you ask?"

"I'm jealous."

"So, so jealous!"

"Tekun's blessing is the kind of thing dwarfs dreams of. Particularly the Protection of the God of Wine."

"Not the Protection of the Craft God?"

"Look, I'm an adventurer, so getting better at blacksmithing doesn't help me much. Besides, any blacksmith who has to ask a god for help is a failure of a blacksmith. Skill's something you have to work for. But every dwarf would love to have good drinks on hand, so we'd all want the Protection of the God of Wine. Getting ahold of good booze just isn't always possible through hard work alone. Only thing that gets you over that barrier is the God of Wine's blessing," Gordon answered. Ryoma saw his point, so next he asked Pioro a question.

"I see, but Pioro, you love alcohol too?"

"Wouldn't say I hate it, but I'm more jealous from a merchant's point of view, to be honest with you. Haven't told you this before, but my company mainly deals in food and drink, so I envy how you can easily get good alcohol."

"Interesting," Ryoma replied.

"Ryoma," Welanna interjected.

"What?"

"I want seconds."

"That was fast! You're done already?!"

"Ryoma, me too."

"Me three."

"Me four."

"Jeff, Hughes, even the Guildmas— I mean, Worgan? You all eat fast."

"Your food's tasty. I've never eaten anything so good before."

"Really? Hearing that makes cooking all worth it, I guess."

"I agree with her. When you get to be my age, your jaw's not as strong as it used to be. The meat they serve in restaurants around town is too tough for me to chew through, but the meat in this pasta is easy to eat. Even this steak is soft. I haven't been able to eat meat like this in ages. I'm glad I came here today."

“And I’m glad you like it. Eat to your heart’s content,” Ryoma said, then got seconds for the four of them and returned to the room. By then, Mizelia, Miya, Reinhart, and Asagi licked their plates clean and ordered seconds as well.

“You too, Reinhart? I’m glad it was to your liking.”

“Haha, I’m sure I would enjoy anything you cook.”

“Really? I’d think you eat better at your parties— Is something wrong?” Ryoma asked, noticing the light in Reinhart’s eyes darken.

“Ryoma, let me teach you something.”

“Y-Yes?”

“Expensive food isn’t necessarily good. When nobles hold parties, the importance of flavor is superseded by extravagance and rarity. We all have different tastes, of course, and when you’re serving one or two people, you can simply offer up meals to their liking. But when you have a large group, that’s impossible. Even so, the host wants to please as many guests as possible. That’s when you resort to elusive and high-grade ingredients, to show how much you care for your guests. It’s always been the safest option.”



“In exchange, you often end up with food that goes overboard on the spices, though.”

“The chefs work hard to cook it, but it’s ruined by the nobles who order it. It’s edible, but not something I would ever eat regularly. The flavor is bad enough, but it’s also too rich for someone my age. In that regard, your cooking is perfect.”

“Your cooking’s a safe bet, Ryoma.”

“I’m glad you like it, but there’s also dessert after this, so leave room for that,” Ryoma said. He had his doubts as to whether sacrificing flavor for expensive ingredients was sensible, but accepted it as standard for aristocratic parties in this country and decided to think about it no further. The calls for more food didn’t wane, with everyone asking at least once, and Welanna and Jeff requesting another plate four times each. Ryoma cocked his head, wondering how all that food fit in their stomachs.

When the apple pie and tea were brought out, the guests’ eyes lit up. That was not simply thanks to the flavor, but because it included honey, a pricey ingredient. This satisfied everyone, and it was particularly popular with the women.

“Mm, I’m stuffed! Today was a purrfect day.”

“I’m glad you all enjoyed it, but I’m surprised you ate so much. Especially you, Jeff, how do you have room for so much food?”

“Huh? I’ve still got room for more. I’ve got the Food Storage skill, you see.”

“What’s that do?”

“You don’t know? It lets you eat a ton at once, then go days without eating anything. You can learn the skill by trying it over and over, apparently. Back when I first became an adventurer, I spent most of my earnings on food and ate gigantic meals, so I picked it up naturally.”

“Jeff’s got that and a bunch of resistance skills from living in the slums. That’s why he’s purretty famous for taking lots of brutal jobs that most adventurers can’t.”

“That’s impressive, Jeff.”

“I pick relatively good jobs, that’s all. I’m nothing special. Like, if you wanted to do what I do, I bet you could. You got some resistance skills that I don’t, yeah? Interested in taking a job alongside me sometime? You could probably handle some tough ones.”

“I’d be happy to try that one day.”

“If you and Jeff teamed up, the guild would sure appreciate it,” Worgan interjected. “Nobody else can keep up with Jeff, so he’s always taking jobs by himself. But there are some jobs that only groups are allowed to take. He’s never been able to touch those ones.”

“What kind of jobs are those?”

“So there was this C-Rank job that involved mining this ore called blazing ore from a volcano, right? You’d need Stench Resistance to have a decent time with that one. Traveling and mining take a long time for this job, and you’ve got the smell of rotten eggs all around you the whole time you’re in this volcano. The whole volcano’s full of some mild poison too, and certain parts of it could be deadly to some folks.”

“There’s poison in a volcano? Mild poison does things like make your eyes swell and tear up, while strong poison can cause breathing complications, is that correct?”

“Yeah, you got it. You know about this stuff?”

“I have some passing knowledge of poison, not much more than that.”

“Well, that’s helpful knowledge for an adventurer to have. Know what you should do about poison? Any medicine that cures it?”

Ryoma thought for a bit, but he knew nothing about this world’s medicine and had no assurance that Earth’s medicine could be created here.

“Sadly, I don’t know, but I believe there’s poison in the smoke and air that erupts from volcanoes. Maybe you could surround yourself in wind magic to protect yourself.”

“Oh? Sounds like the old lady who taught you about poison and medicine knew her stuff. I’ve been the guildmaster for years, but poison and disease always took me by surprise. Still do.”

Somewhat shocked to hear that, Ryoma laughed and remarked on how unbelievable an individual he was, then decided to talk to Carme and Carla.

“Carme, Carla, how was the food?”

“It was delicious,” they both said.

“That’s good. By the way, I appreciate that you’re working here, but are you sure you want to? Like I said in the store, I don’t think you’ll have the chance to make use of your talents here.”

“I was just discussing that with my brother.”

“Please do allow us to work here.”

“Huh, did something happen? You don’t sound as hesitant anymore,” Ryoma said. The twins spoke with confidence in a way they didn’t when they visited the store. The difference was stark enough for Ryoma to notice.

“That was a shameful display we gave you earlier. After seeing you and your store in person, we rethought matters.”

“We had great concerns at first, but the tools and the business you’ve constructed have much we can learn from.”

“You sure changed your minds quickly.”

“Master Ryoma, your youth means you have the capacity to absorb things more flexibly. I could have introduced you to someone with more skill or experience, but I chose these two for their flexibility.”

“We hope to neither bring shame to the Morgan Trading Company nor the Takebayashi family. We will do what we can!” the twins declared. Ryoma looked at them and felt they were similar to Serge.

“Thanks, it’ll help to have someone with more business knowledge around. I have no complaints. It’s a pleasure to work with you.”

“OK!” The twins replied with big smiles. Serge watched them with satisfaction.

“But don’t push yourselves too hard. Just treat it like any old job. The Morgan Trading Company is one thing, but you don’t need to think about my family.”

“No, it’s natural to work with that in mind. Even the slightest damage to your reputation would quickly spread among the nobles.”

“Huh? Do they talk about every new store that opens, Carme?”

“Most of them keep an eye on the actions of other families, I presume. I believe my sister is right.”

“Other families? Do you two happen to think I’m a noble?”

“Are you not? We heard you had connections with the duke’s family,” both the twins said.

“I do, as you can see, but we only met through happenstance. I’m not a noble. Serge?”

“Sorry, I don’t think I was ever clear to them about that,” Serge admitted. Ryoma and the twins finally realized the misunderstanding between them and began to talk it through. Meanwhile, another group was watching them and chatting from nearby.

“Hey, hag.”

“What do you want, clod?”

“You think Ryoma’s place is gonna be that profitable? It’s a pretty strange sort of store.”

“I’m sure it will be. I don’t know precisely how much money it’ll make either, though,” Glissela acknowledged. Worgan furrowed his brow.

“Have any tips for him?”

“I intend to watch and wait unless something happens. He can run the store the way he thinks he should.”

“You sure that’ll work out?”

“Serge assigned a couple of employees to him. If any suspicious folks set their sights on this place, they should be able to handle it. And if worst comes to worst, I believe he’s capable of asking for help. If he asks me for a favor, I’d be happy to lend him a hand as a merchant. The only problem is there are some greedy, relentless

merchants out there that are willing to use force. Just watch out for them.”

“I know, but he might not even need help with that. He got in a fight with a group called Fang of Obtemo the other day.”

“Everyone was talking about those adventurer thugs. Did Ryoma take them down?”

“Yeah, he ran into them on a job. You’ve probably heard the rest. It was a totally one-sided fight. He’s also performed well at slaying goblins and that sort of work. His slimes shouldn’t be underestimated, from what I hear.”

“Do they use weapons?” Someone else joined in their conversation.

“Old man Taylor, you know about them too?”

“An adventurer came to ask if slimes can use weapons the other day. All my staff were talking about it. I didn’t actually see one in person until today, though. I should recommend that he take a class sometime.”

“It probably would be best for him to learn what a normal tamer is like. Well, anyway, be careful.”

“I know, I know.”

“Talented folks are always welcome. Reinbach also asked me for a favor too, so there’s that.”

This conversation took place in a corner of the room, unbeknownst to Ryoma, who spent time with his new friends from this world. When the opening party finally ended, everyone told Ryoma not to work too hard, then headed home. With that finished, Ryoma cleaned up what remained after the banquet and took a look around outside his store. He had a sense of fulfillment that he never experienced in his old world.

Chapter 2 Episode 28: Opening Day

The Next Day ~Ryoma's Side~

After the gathering yesterday, Carme and Carla insisted they could get to work as early as possible tomorrow, so I decided to open for business today and come to the store early in the morning. It was 5AM.

"Maybe I came a little too early," I wondered. I came in at the time I would have in my old world, which did me no good. I didn't expect the twins to get there for a while, so I killed time playing with the slimes.



"Good morning, boss," the twins said.

"Good morning, Carme and Carla. I'm excited to work with you today," I replied. After they arrived, I performed a cursory check of the store and prepared to open for business. That probably sounds like more work than it was, but all I did was stick the cleaner slime in the standby room and get out the bags and spare change. The twins brought the bags I ordered in the morning, so they were put to use right away.

"Now then, I'm heading out," I announced.

"See you later," the twins said. I wasn't sure whether to leave the store in their hands on the first day, but I couldn't advertise with fliers or anything, so I decided to tell people about my store while I accepted a job from the guild. Serge did get me employees who could take care of everything, so honestly, maybe I wasn't even needed. But I guess that's the point of hiring people. I thought about it as I visited the neighboring store on the way to the guild. I had to tell Pauline that my store was open for business.

"Excuse me, is anyone here?" I asked. They appeared to be open, but nobody was inside, so I called out for someone. Pauline came running from the back of the store.

"Hello? Oh! If it isn't Ryoma? Here to buy seeds again?"

"No, but my laundromat, Bamboo Forest, opened today. I just wanted to tell you."

"Oh my, open already? That was quick."

"Yes, thanks to everyone's help. You can have that bag I gave you

the other day for free, so I hope you try out our services. Tell Mary and Kiara about it too. I can tell my two employees that you're coming."

"You have employees?"

"An acquaintance introduced them to me. While I'm off adventuring, they'll run the store all by themselves. Also, I'll have to pay them with my income from adventuring until my business really picks up."

They said that as long as they got to work in the end, they didn't need to get paid, but that didn't sit well with me. Honestly, I didn't know why they wanted to work for me so badly. Serge probably offered more complex duties to make the best of their talents, and I'd think it paid better too. Maybe they were trying to make connections. Anyway, I couldn't complain.

"Considering the size of your store, I have to wonder if that's necessary. Well, good luck, you have my support. I'll try it out today."

"Thank you. I'll get to work, then."

I waved goodbye and left the store. As soon as I got to the guild, people called out to me.

"Ryoma, is your laundry place gonna open soon?"

"When's it open?"

"I hope it opens soon!"

The adventurers I rode with when I went to slay monsters at the abandoned mine had been chatting with me a bit more lately. They were looking forward to when my laundromat opened, apparently.

"Bamboo Forest opens today, actually."

"Really?!"

"Yes. We provide an equipment-cleaning service for adventurers that you're welcome to use."

"Heck yeah! I'm totally going there on the way home today!"

I loudly talked about the store to advertise to everyone around us, then took a job that involved collecting herbs. I decided to take care of that while I looked around the mine.



Hours later...

I told the twins they could run the store, but out of curiosity, I decided to wrap up my work and go back early. Even though it was our first day of business, people were gathered outside. More than twenty people, in fact! I panicked and entered the store, where Carla greeted me.

"Welcome— Oh, Boss!"

"Carla, what's going on here?"

"We're making a killing, but we're so busy!"

“Boss! Some ladies from the neighborhood came to ask us to do laundry,” Carme said as he carried laundry from the back of the store. We had to handle all these people!

“I’ll help. You two take care of the customers, I’ll do all the carrying!” I commanded and focused intently on my work. But the more people we served, the more people came. What was going on?! In the end, the waves of people didn’t cease until after 3PM. I couldn’t say there were that many of them by that point, but explaining how our store worked to every single one of them took some time. Our store was evidently cheaper than the norm, so the customers were surprised they could get laundry done for our prices. It also made some of them ask if we were going to make a separate charge later for a high price. Many of them weren’t convinced about our service, unfortunately. The large crowd that we had for a while drew some city guards to come see what the hubbub was about, too.

But this turned out to be in our favor. The guard captain heard about the store from the other guards and asked us to do laundry for the whole squad. They paid for laundry for thirty-five, for which they bought two bags. They hired people to do laundry for the guards until last year, but a government official at the time implemented a budget cut that made it no longer possible. They were just glad their pay didn’t go down, but after a bit of complaining to me about the government, they said they’d ask me to do it. Maybe I had myself a big contract already.

But we opened at 8AM, and it took about three minutes to serve each customer. I didn’t know when the customers started coming, but it seemed like Carme and Carla were working for seven hours straight without even taking a lunch break.

That didn’t sound great to me. Maybe I could deal with that, but not these two. With these conditions, my store was hardly better than a sweatshop! I wanted to avoid that at all costs! I swore on my previous world that I wouldn’t let that happen!

“Good work today, you two.”

“You too, Boss.”

“That was a lot of people.”

“Yes, really. Do you think we should hire more employees?”

“It might be best to do that soon, yes. If you want to let your employees take turns taking breaks, you’ll need to hire somewhere from four to six people. We spent most of our time explaining the system to people today, but judging by the response from customers, we don’t have enough people to do even the minimum for our jobs,” Carla answered promptly.

“The customers were satisfied with the speed and quality of our work, so I expect we’ll see even more visitors tomorrow. You should

be able to find more employees right away if you put out a notice at the guild."

"I see. How much should I offer to pay?"

"Anywhere from 120 to 150 sute a day would be plenty. That's enough to live on day to day and still have some savings. That's extraordinary for a starting salary, so I'm sure you would be quick to find applicants."

"If it weren't so urgent, we could take the time to find employees who will work for less, but hiring people who can begin work right away should take priority."

"Then I'll head to the guild right away. It sounds like the sooner, the better."

"Please do," the twins replied. Trusting their input, I hurried out of the store. The problem would best be solved as soon as possible. But as I left the store, I ran into four neighbors carrying a large bag.

"Oh, Ryoma."

"Pauline, Renny, Rick, and Sieg, you're all together? What's that you're holding?"

"We were hoping to get laundry done at your place. I'm a butcher, so I've got blood stains on a lot of my clothes," Sieg answered. He was Pauline's husband, and he worked as a butcher next door to the flower shop. I got all the meat I cooked at the opening party from Sieg's store.

TV shows and the like always depicted butchers as big and muscular men, but Sieg was the complete opposite. He was fairly tall, at least, but also skinny. Extremely skinny. Like a gust of wind could send him flying. He didn't look healthy.

"An adventurer told me that you can even wash blood stains out."

"I'd been planning to buy new clothes, but let's see how you can clean these up."

"Thank you. If you don't mind me asking, do you have any employees?"

"Ten, myself included."

"We offer a service for seven or more people, so I suggest using that. A bag that fits up to fourteen people's worth of clothes costs a medium bronze coin and eight small bronze coins, so that will be cheaper for you."

"Really? That's a bargain."

"We'll take that."

While we were discussing business, Rick butted in.

"Ryoma, what are you doing? Slacking off from work?"

"Hahaha, I'm sure that's the way it looks, but no. I'm on my way to the Merchant's Guild."

"Is that right?" Renny asked.

“We have more business than expected, and it looks like we’ll be short on staff if this continues.”

“Seriously?! Didn’t you just open?!”

“We advertised in a few ways, but I never thought we’d get this many customers. I’m in a rush to hire more employees.”

“That’s a surprise. There are that many customers?”

“Yes, I have two employees who’ve been working since this morning, and they’ve gone for seven hours without breaks.”

After that conversation, I parted ways with them and visited the Merchant’s Guild. They let me into the reception office, where the guildmaster came to see me.

“Nice of you to visit. But didn’t your business open today? Is there a problem?”

“We’re unexpectedly busy, so we’re short on staff already.”

“On your first day? Even I couldn’t have predicted that. You want to hire more staff today? All right, I’ll get together some folks who could start work tomorrow. You can be the one to choose who to hire.” With that, she exited the room and left me waiting in the reception office.



I was told that the potential employees were assembled, then led to a meeting room. There were thirty people of all ages, sexes, and species. Among them was one strange pair standing together. They gave me a brief look, then turned to look straight ahead. Were they appraising me the same way I was them? Many others eyed me briefly, then looked away as if they lost interest.

“Now then, everyone here can do basic math. Any of them could begin work immediately.”

“Got it. Nice to meet you, everyone, I’m the manager of a laundromat called Bamboo Forest. My name is Ryoma Takebayashi. Thank you for taking time out of your schedules to gather here today,” I said. Everyone began to whisper to each other. From what I could hear, they thought I was an errand boy, not the one doing the hiring. They must not have been appraising me after all, but given I looked like an 11-year-old, that made sense. After my introduction, I ignored the clearly disappointed people and continued.

“Ahem, first I’d like to know if anyone here objects to working at my store,” I asked. There were some complaints, mainly from the young people. My childlike appearance was enough to demotivate some of them, and I didn’t need those people as employees. Considering the number of potential applicants who showed up, maybe pay should have been the last thing I discussed. Drawing such a crowd because of the money on offer was annoying. There were

more than I could hire, so I had to weed some out anyway.

Some of them expressed their discontent, so I said I wasn't forcing anyone to work for me. That led to a whole stream of people flooding out of the room. I didn't think they would leave so readily. I was expecting them to at least stay for an interview, but I did say they could go if they wanted.

Five-sixths of them left, leaving only five. I understood the dissatisfaction of those who left, but it was still unfortunate. I would have to thank the few who stayed.

"For the rest of you, I'll talk to you assuming you're interested in working at my store. But before that, I should offer my appreciation. Thanks for being willing to work for such a young man," I said and bowed to them before I moved on to the topic at hand. "Let me get to the main point. My store, Bamboo Forest, is currently hiring employees to serve customers and carry loads. The loads in question will only be clothes, so you don't need to be terribly strong, anyone will do. The one warning I'll give is that I'm a tamer, and my slimes live in the store. I use them as employees as well."

The five who stayed behind were surprised. That I was a tamer was normal, but they didn't seem to expect my use of slimes as workers.

"So anyone who fears or hates slimes might find it difficult to work for me. Does anyone have a problem with that?" I asked. A woman raised her hand. "What is it?"

"Are you using those slimes because you don't have other employees? Or would you use them whether you had more employees or not?"

"I would use them either way. I know some people may not like this, but I'd want you to treat the slimes like your coworkers," I answered. The woman and two of the other people refused to work with monsters and left. That left only a middle-aged man and a young woman. I didn't know if job interviews were supposed to work that way, or if I was doing something wrong.

The guild simply gathered people who could work right away, and not necessarily ones who wanted to work at my store, but this still came as a surprise. It was clear enough whether they approved or disapproved, at least. The final two were, strangely enough, the ones who drew my attention at the beginning.

Chapter 2 Episode 29: Hiring

“To the two of you that are still here, you don’t mind slimes? Everyone else left, so I assume so,” I asked. They quietly nodded. “Then can you tell me your names? And if there’s anything in particular you want before I hire you, by all means tell me. Let’s start with the man.”

I called out to the middle-aged man on the right first. Both he and the woman had my curiosity. Their clothes were far from what you tended to see around town, like something Chinese people in a kung fu film would wear, so I noticed them the moment they entered the room. The man’s staff and the woman’s hair ornament were especially peculiar.

“I am Fay,” the man said while I was watching them. “This is my daughter, Lilyn. We would appreciate it if you can hire us both.” He even sounded like someone from a kung fu movie.

“You’re father and daughter?” I asked.

“My daughter looks more like her mother, not so much me. There is also one thing I must tell you,” Fay said and showed me his right leg. It had a wooden brace on it.

“I am a merchant from a country called Gilmar. It has become dangerous due to war, so I fled. But by the time I got to this country, most of my money had been stolen. All I have left are my belongings and my daughter. At first I had no money, so I worked as a miner to make what little I could, but a cave-in broke my right leg. I don’t have the money to ask a healer to cure it, so it will take some time to recover. Can I still work for you, even with a bad leg?”

A broken bone could be cured with a few casts of High Heal, a mid-tier healing spell. A high tier version called Mega Heal could also do the job with a single cast. I couldn’t use either, but a healing slime likely could. Either way, Fay could work solely as a receptionist until he recovered.

“If you don’t mind working at a desk until you get better, your leg isn’t a big issue.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and receptionist work is a perfectly fine job. If you can serve the customers well, then we don’t have a problem. What do you want for a salary?”

“As long as I make enough to live on, that’s plenty.”

“I see. Then let me talk to your daughter next. Lilyn, right? How much do you need?”

“The same as him. I want to make enough to survive, and I want to be hired alongside my father. If you could either let us live at the store or introduce us to cheap inns or housing, that would also be nice. We currently live in temporary lodging courtesy of the guild, which we’ll have to leave when we find work.”



“Many say they can’t hire me because of my leg. My daughter is doing odd jobs for the guild, which has earned us just barely enough to take care of ourselves. We actually don’t have much money left. As long as you have somewhere we can stay for cheap, we can’t complain.”

If they wanted to stay at the store, the lodging I set up for employees was empty, so that was fine. They also said that they could work for low pay, so the amount I had planned should have been enough. They may have been foreigners, but we were able to come to an understanding.

They also seemed to be hiding some considerable strength. They were as guarded against attacks as Jeff and the like, and they would at least be better fighters than the thieves and adventurers I had taken on before. If I hired them, they might be effective bodyguards for the store too.

“We do have rooms for employees to live in, so you’re free to use them if you like.”

“Really?! I’m glad I asked!”

Everyone else had left anyway, and they seemed capable enough. That left only one thing.

“I have one last question, but before that, I need to ask the guildmaster something.”

“What do you need?”

“Sorry, but can you leave the room for a bit? I’ll be revealing a bit about my store,” I said casually, but seriously wanted her to leave. These people probably didn’t work any ordinary jobs. The smell of death was upon them, I guess you could say. There were plenty of people in this world who killed in self-defense. Even I had killed thirty thieves myself. But these people had likely murdered far more. I had never encountered someone who came across this way, in either my old world or this one. Maybe I could protect myself if worse came to worst, but not if I had to defend the guildmaster at the same time.

“Why drive me out? If something’s on your mind, tell me,” she asked sincerely in return.

“Like I said, it’s about my store’s secrets,” I continued to insist, ever wary of the other two.

“Guildmaster, that’s enough,” Fay interjected. “He figured us out.” Now I felt like my anxiety was all wrong. What was the meaning of this? “Manager, who are you? We’re ex-assassins, but we mean you and the guildmaster no harm.” It was true that I sensed no hostility.

“Guildmaster, did you know about this?” I asked. The guildmaster sighed.

“Of course. I don’t know how other places do it, but anyone who

gets work through my guild, especially foreigners, must be checked by me personally. If they turned out to be spies, I certainly couldn't give them any work. These two really did flee their country. How did you figure out the rest, though?"

"I was trying so hard to act like a normal citizen, too."

"You and the guildmaster are the only ones to find out so far. If you picked up on our secret, you can't be any ordinary person. Very interesting," Lilyn said calmly, while Fay looked shocked and faintly smiled.

"I don't have the eyes the guildmaster does, but I've studied combat for a long time, so I can get a sense for how strong someone is. Also..."

"What?"

"I noticed that you're both hiding weapons."

"Fay! Lilyn! Is that true?!"

"Ack, so you found that out too?"

"I was once taught more about concealed weapons than I ever cared to know, you see. The world's most frightening creatures are humans because they can use their heads, deceive others, and strike while their guard is down. The best weapons for such a purpose are those that can be concealed. To learn how to protect yourself from attacks with these weapons is to learn the weapons yourself," I said. That was what my father told me, but thinking about it now brought back memories. "I was attacked a lot in my everyday life."

"Just what kind of life did you live?"

"Are you the same type of person we are? Doesn't seem like it."

"You're like us, and yet not. Like you only learned the techniques, strangely." If they could tell that much from looking at me, these people were amazing.

"I learned them from a teacher, yes. I didn't begin to use them until three years ago, and only a few times, against thieves."

"It's a difference of experience, then. Our job back in our country was to execute lawbreakers like traitors and thieves. Our country has much fighting and chaos. If you didn't have people like us to hunt down and kill criminals, nobody would be safe. What I said about being a merchant wasn't a lie, though, I do normally work as a peddler."

"The master we served lost a war, so we lost our country, our jobs, and our purpose. That's why we came to this nation. There were no jobs we could take pride in. Will you still hire us knowing this?"

"If the guildmaster approves of you, I don't see why I shouldn't. As long as you can work, I have no complaints," I said. Assuming they were harmless now, there was no reason to get on their case about their past. Everyone has some secrets to hide.

“Really? I thought nobody’d hire us if they knew that.”

“We were prepared to run away, even.”

“Oh, no, don’t do that. I’m short of employees at the moment, and everyone else left. What’s important is the present, not the past. Please do work for me. Also, if I ever need you for an additional job, can you serve as bodyguards?” I asked. If the guildmaster knew their circumstances and still kept them around, it couldn’t have been much of a problem. The guildmaster had a better eye for people than I did. Sometimes I felt like she could tell I was actually over 40, but I hoped I was imagining it.

“We can do that perfectly well.”

“We’ve worked as bodyguards as well.”

“Then you’re officially hired. It’s a pleasure to work with you,” I said. We bowed to each other, then the guildmaster spoke up.

“Are you finished? Then get going. There should be a carriage waiting outside.”

“Thank you, Guildmaster.”

“Don’t worry about it. Fay, Lilyn, work hard. This kid’s store has potential. Also, quit hiding weapons!”

“But not carrying weapons feels wrong,” Fay and Lilyn said in unison.

“How long are you gonna keep acting like assassins! You’re merchants now! Sorry, but they’re not bad people, and they haven’t technically committed any crimes. Take care of them.”

“Understood.”

“Also, take this. These documents show their work history. Says they have previous experience with military service. Show it to the two folks Serge sent you.”

“Got it. Wait, shouldn’t you have shown me these at the start?” I asked. The guildmaster cackled.

“Just wanted to see how good your eyes are. I was wondering if you could pick out some good employees with no prior information. I was surprised when most of them left right away, but you hit the jackpot with these two. They can get the job done. And you seem to have pretty decent eyes yourself, though I don’t know how well they’d work for you as a merchant. Anyway, good luck out there.”

“Thank you.”

Fay, Lilyn, and I got on the carriage the guildmaster prepared for me and returned to my store.



There weren’t as many customers when I got back as there were that noon, but there were still tons. The twins looked busy.

“Welcome back, boss!” they said.

“Quite a lot of people,” Fay remarked.

“Is this your store, Boss? It’s doing good business,” Lilyn noted.

“Give me a moment. Carme, Carla, I’ll help. First we need to serve the customers.”

“Boss, I’ll help. I can carry stuff.”

“Me too, laundry’s not more than I can carry.”

“Thanks! Don’t push yourself too hard, just do what you can.”

They offered to help on their own, so I happily let them. Fay was only supposed to be a receptionist, but he seemed able to move around to some extent. We were able to make it through the rush of customers that night and arrive at closing time in one piece. I put up the sign saying we were closed and shut the door.

“Thanks for a hard day’s work, everyone!” I said. They all thanked me back.

“Master Ryoma, are they the ones you hired today?”

“Yes, the man is Fay, and the woman is Lilyn.”

“My name is Fay. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Lilyn. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Carme Norad.”

“I’m Carla Norad. It’s nice to meet you too.”

“The plan was to have them start work tomorrow, but they ended up beginning today, I guess.”

“We’re living here while we work, so of course.”

“Helping when it’s busy is only natural. Also, may I ask something?”

“What is it, Fay?”

“We carried the laundry today, but when is the laundry actually done? All we did with it was put it in a wall for a slime to take.”

“Oh right, I didn’t explain how we do laundry, did I?”

I used the cleaner slime and a goblin’s loincloth to demonstrate to the two of them. They seemed to understand. When they saw how busy we were, they also seemed to recognize the potential that the guildmaster mentioned. They were especially surprised when I told them this was our opening day.

Getting this many customers on opening day was even rare in my old world, unless you were a pachinko parlor. For this world, it was apparently extremely rare to have this much business right away. From what the customers told me, news of my store was spread by adventurers.

The adventurers that I slayed goblins with told their fellow adventurers, their families, and average civilians. When I introduced the place to Pauline, that also seemed to deliver the news among the local housewives, so people had heard about the laundromat from various sources.

“Our services are cheap, so a lot of customers came to try it this morning.”

“A lot of the customers in the afternoon said they heard about it from people who tried it. I imagine we’ll see similar results for the next few days.”

This world had no cell phones or social media, so I underestimated the power of word of mouth. Maybe my haphazard advertising was to blame, though it was certainly to my store’s benefit. It was over for now, at any rate, so I decided to take the time to cure Fay’s leg.

“Carla, Carme, can you clean up the shop for the night?”

“Understood,” they said.

“Thank you. Fay, Lilyn, come with me.”

I had them wait in the break room, then fetched two healing slimes. They were surprised when I said these creatures could cast High Heal, but they appreciated and accepted the help. Thanks to the healing slimes’ efforts, Fay’s leg fully recovered. Broken bones vary in severity, but this injury took them three casts of High Heal each for a total of six casts.

“Thanks for that, I’m glad to have this leg taken care of.”

“Healers charge a lot for their services. You don’t mind doing this for free?”

“Making it easier for my employees to work is my job. If my slimes or I can do something for you, I won’t charge for it.”

There were healers in town, but you had to pay them an amount based on their skill and magical energy for each individual spell they cast. To fully heal a broken bone required multiple casts that would demand a high price, so rather than seek healing, Fay planned to do assorted jobs within the guild as he waited for the fracture to recover.

“If I had just brought more money from my country, I could have had it healed with magic right away. I used everything I had for bribes when I was fleeing across the border.”

“And that’s why you’re broke?”

“The border guards from our country are awfully greedy. They’ll let any crime slide if you pay up, but if you don’t have money, they’ll turn you over to the government and be rewarded for it. I couldn’t be stingy about what I paid, unfortunately. If they could’ve made more for turning us in, we either would’ve been captured or found it harder to escape.” Fay whispered.

“Because of the type of work we did for our country, the reward on our heads would be higher than normal. Some of the guards get suspicious enough to capture ordinary people as it is, so anyone who tries fleeing our country gives up most of their assets. You don’t think much about saving money when your life’s on the line,” Lilyn

murmured equally quietly. Gilmar sounded like a nasty country with all that war and chaos they mentioned. After we talked for a bit longer, I gave them their rooms, where they set up all their belongings. Then I returned to the store and asked Carla about our earnings that day. The answer surprised me.

“Today we made 791 medium bronze coins and eight small bronze coins for a total of 7918 sute,” she reported. I asked the twins exactly how good that was, since they were the pros. They said that for a business that doesn’t have nobles as customers, a mid-sized company makes around 4000 sute a day. Even if we subtracted our expenses, the fact that we made more than that on our opening day was shocking.

“This is amazing!”

“We can already start to compete with the big companies that don’t sell to nobles!”

“How much do they make in a day?”

“Around 20000 sute, generally speaking. If you have any nobles as customers, that can cause your earnings to skyrocket. The expenses are high, but if you sell high-quality goods, they can turn a big profit.”

“A lot of people will pay a premium for luxuries.”

“I see. Well, nobles aren’t relevant to our case, but if we can make 2.5 times what we did today, we really could rank among the big companies.”

“Considering what we managed today, I expect we’ll reach that goal within the month. We’ve yet to receive our share from the Adventurer’s Guild, so when you consider them, we’ll have even more customers.”

“There may come a time when our daily earnings add up to a whole medium gold coin.”

“I don’t know about that,” I said with a chuckle. A medium gold coin was 50000 sute, well beyond the realm of what was reasonable.

“It’s possible,” the twins said, much to my disbelief.

“This is a mining town. There are a lot of miners and metalworkers. I hear there aren’t as many people as when the big mine was abandoned a few years ago, but there’s still a population of ten-thousand.”

“And the customers won’t necessarily pay for only one bag each. I think it would be hard to make more than a medium gold coin’s worth of profit all the time, but in the event that we get a big request from the Adventurer’s Guild, for example, we could earn as much that way.”

“I see,” I said. Maybe it could happen once or twice.

“Also, if you open branches in other towns, you could easily earn more than a medium gold coin’s worth of profit per day.”

“Talking about opening branch stores already? It’s a bit early for that.”

“Maybe so, but it’s worth thinking about.”

“As long as you have employees you can trust, opening more stores is well worth considering.”

It was true that we turned quite a profit for our first day. I decided to consider it for the future, but I wanted to see how this played out for now.

“Oh, I forgot to give you something. Here’s the work history for the two new employees.”

“We’ll take a look,” the twins said and began to read the papers.

“They say they’re willing to work for the bare minimum they need to live on, but I also decided to ask them to be bodyguards, so pay them 150 sute a day, please.”

“They both served in the military? That’s reassuring.”

“Understood.”

After that, I said goodbye to my four employees and returned to the inn. When I got there, I reported to Reinhart and the others about my earnings that day. They were stunned.

Chapter 2 Episode 30: Personnel Additions

The next day...

After I prepared to open for business in the morning, I went shopping for products to welcome my two new employees with, then returned to the store.

“There are this many people already?” I asked. I left the store when it opened at 8AM and shopped for about an hour. It should have only been around 9AM. Now I wondered what time of day we had the most business.

I pondered about that as I entered through the employees only door behind the store. Carla and Fay were taking orders while Carme and Lilyn were carrying and returning laundry. We didn’t seem to have any problems so far. I left the work to them and started cooking.

There was no telling when it might get busier, so I wanted to feed everyone while there was still time to eat. I kneaded the dough, then rounded and stretched it. Once that was finished, I smeared it with meat sauce.

By the way, this meat sauce was left over from the opening party two days prior. I made a fridge using barrier magic that preserved food better than leaving it outside. I appraised it just in case, and it turned out there were no problems. If, say, Serge heard about the fridge, it might cause another uproar. Maybe Piro would be more likely to make a ruckus over it. He did say that he handles food.

I sprinkled cheese, sliced onions, and some herbs on top of the base, then stuck it all in a heated kettle to bake it. In the meantime, I prepared the salads and drinks. While I took care of that, the pizza finished cooking. It exuded a fragrant scent. I tried out a piece for myself, and it was excellent. And ready to eat before it got too busy, thankfully.

“Lunch is ready, everyone. I can take over for someone so we can take turns eating.”

“Thank you,” my employees said. First, Lilyn and Carla switched places with me. After they ate, Fay and Carme went to get their share, giving everyone a chance to rest and eat. When noon passed, it got just as busy as yesterday, but we somehow managed to get through it together.

“Good work, everyone.”

“Good work, Ryoma!” they said. It went better than the previous day, but we only went from overworking our employees to being able to function as a normal business. If even one employee were unable to work, we would take a big hit. I wouldn’t even have time to cook lunch for everyone if that happened.

“Another busy day. How much did we make?”

“According to my calculations, 11877 sute,” Carla said and showed me her notes. If we made 1.5 times as much as yesterday, that was a significant increase over a single day.

“Those are some nice sales.”

“More than just nice, business is booming.”

“At this rate, we’ll end up with even more customers.”

“Lilyn, Fay, you think so too? Maybe I should hire more employees. My original plan was to hire three or four people, but if anyone gets sick or something now, it’ll put a heavy load on the rest of us.”

“Yes, I think that would be wise.”

“I know you just did this yesterday, but it would help if you can go to the guild and hire someone again.”

“Understood. I’d also like to hire a cook, but could I find one at the Merchant’s Guild?” I asked.

“Yes,” Carme answered. “But why a cook?”

“If we have our hands full with work, how are we supposed to make lunch? I was thinking I’d hire someone who can take care of that.”

“I see what you mean, but any regular employee could do that job.”

“But if we had someone to do that job exclusively, it gives the rest of us more time. Besides, wouldn’t it motivate you more if there were a good meal to look forward to? Consider it a perk.”

“I agree with you, but what is a perk?”

“Oh, well, it’s a way of considering what would help your employees work most comfortably, I guess you could say,” I tried to explain. Apparently they didn’t think about employee benefits here. Or maybe most businesses didn’t have them.

“I do think you’ve thought a lot about what’s best for your employees.”

“You’re giving us housing and paying as well at the same time. You don’t find employers like that very often.”

“Good pay, warm, comfortable rooms, and today’s food was great too. My father and I would be lucky to find something better.”

“I’m glad to hear that. So can you handle the rest of the day without me? I’m planning to go hire someone, then head on home.”

“Have a good day,” the four of them said as they saw me off.



When I got to the guild, I was once again let into the reception room for a meeting with the guildmaster.

“Nice to see you. Here to hire someone again?”

“Business has been unexpectedly good, so we have the money for it.”

“I see, then how many more employees do you want?”

“I’d like three more employees to work the store, plus a chef.”

“A chef?”

“We’re so busy that our employees barely have the time to cook, so as long as I’m hiring people, I thought it might be nice if they had the chance to eat something good. And for the sake of their health, I want them to get something nutritious.”

“That’s why you want to hire someone just to cook? That’s pretty atypical.”

“Is it?”

“Most stores just have one of the regular employees do it. Bigger stores will hire people to do assorted work like this, but you seldom see anyone go out of their way to appoint a chef. Well, it’s not a bad idea. Hold on a sec, I’ll see if anyone’s interested.”

“Ask people who weren’t here yesterday, please,” I requested. Some time later, the guildmaster introduced me to four people.

“Nice to meet you! I’m Jane!”

“I’m Maria!”

“My name is Fina.”

“I’m Chelma, a chef.”



The first three were young women who came to this town from an impoverished village as a group, looking to make some money. Jane was energetic, Maria was laid-back, and Fina was more the serious type, based on first impressions. Chelma couldn't have been substantially older than them, but she was to some degree. She came across like a mother.

I assumed the guildmaster knew how to pick people better than me, and when I asked if they were interested in working for me just to be sure, they all nodded. Apparently they changed their mind after hearing about my store's success, since I did see them in the lineup when I came yesterday. The guildmaster also lectured them about how safe my store was.

Me and all my employees had been evaluated by the guildmaster, so there probably wasn't much to worry about with these women either. The three village girls seemed like what I saw was what I'd get. They wouldn't have any unique skills, but that was fine. Chelma's previous job was at an ordinary inn, and she said she couldn't cook anything lavish, but that wasn't an issue either. They seemed like good people, so I decided to hire them all.

Business was taken care of within ten minutes of arriving at the guild. All the connections I had turned out to be important, to be sure. The four new employees wanted to live in the store as well, so after the contracts were signed, we ended up returning to the shop with the carriage waiting outside. Before that, the guildmaster told me one last thing.

"Ryoma, if this keeps up, I'd consider opening up a couple more stores in other towns. You can do it right away if you want. Just consult with me when you're ready," she said. I was stunned to hear the same thing Carme and Carla said. Then she tapped me on the back with her staff and encouraged me to keep it together. When we got to the store, Carme and Carla were still there.

"Boss, I thought you were going home," they said. I told them about the new employees who wanted to live at the store, introduced everyone, then let them handle the rest.



Four days had passed since I hired the new employees. The three village girls worked hard, and Chelma's cooking was delectable. I stayed at the store on the first day to be sure everything could run well without me, and there were no problems. Two days ago, I even had the time to wash the walls outside and trim the lawn. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to patrol the abandoned mine.

It had only been a week since opening day, but our sales still

hadn't declined. If I lived frugally, I could survive three months for each day's worth of profit. I was somewhat awestruck, but it was all thanks to my tireless employees.

They could keep everything running fine without me by that point, so I could return to my adventuring work. But just when that occurred to me, I was summoned by Serge.

"Sorry I took so long to get here."

"Master Ryoma, I'm glad you're here. Now, come this way."

"Excuse me."

"Apologies for the sudden call."

"That's fine, my employees are good enough to run the store themselves now. The twins you sent me have been doing good work too."

"Is that right? It sounds like they've proven useful to you. That's a relief."

"You've done a lot to help me, Serge."

"Same goes here. I'm making a tidy profit thanks to all the bags and daily necessities you're buying off us."

"That's been great for me too. Everything's going so smoothly that it's almost scary."

"Everyone in town's been talking about it lately. It's even drawn the guild's attention," Serge said, then sighed before he continued. "And you have the chance to make even more money. Isn't that a shock?" I cocked my head at that. "Master Ryoma, I'm talking about the waterproof cloth."

"Oh, right." I had completely forgotten.

"Did you know that the mass outbreak of grell frogs is coming up soon?"

"Yes, I've heard."

"Grell frogs live in swamps. Their hides can produce armor and their organs make good medicine, so they sell for a high price. During the mass outbreak, tons of adventurers travel to the swamps where they thrive. It would be a good opportunity to advertise products such as boots made from that waterproof cloth, so I was thinking we should begin to produce and sell them soon. As such, I wanted to ask just how many you can make, which is why I called you here today."

I had 907 sticky slimes at the moment, so it depended on how much cloth I had.

"The process involves modifying regular cloth, so I would need to ask for the material, but how long would a strip of cloth be to start with?"

"If you're getting it from me, then about seventy meters," Serge answered. Taking more than I could use would do neither of us any good. Thinking conservatively, ten slimes could do maybe one strip of

cloth in a day. If I had twenty of my slimes work on one sheet each day to be safe, that's at least 45 sheets.

"Then once we're ready for production, we could create around 45 to 90 sheets a day. They'll take some time to dry, though, so it may be a bit less than that," I said. Serge's face brightened.

"Ten sheets a day to start with would have been good enough. Any more than that is much appreciated."

"Understood. Shall I get started on that today?"

"Please do."

"Then I'd like to buy some cloth to use as materials."

"You can have it for free. It'll be returned to me as waterproof cloth, so I'll simply pay the production cost when you hand it over. How much will that be?"

"You can decide the price. Whatever is reasonable, please," I said. Serge lightly laughed.

"When a merchant has something they know will sell, they're supposed to overcharge. Your offer is great for me, though. On another topic, where will you be doing the work? If people learn you're the one producing these, who knows what kind of suspicious fellows you could find on your doorstep. Do you have any safe work spaces in mind? If not, I could get one ready for you."

"I'd like to set up shop in the mine that was abandoned the other day."

"You certainly wouldn't have to worry about anyone showing up there, but are you sure that's the best place?"

"I can wander around there all I want, since I hold the title of Manager. I can also use earth magic to create a large work space."

Once that was settled, I took the cloth, left the store, and headed to the abandoned mine.

Chapter 2 Episode 31: Working in the Abandoned Mine

I arrived at the abandoned mine and mobilized all my slimes aside from the cleaners. After I patrolled the mine shafts, I cleaned up the shaft situated at the highest point in the mine and turned it into a work space. All that really entailed was using earth magic to create some work stands in an already large area, so it wasn't much of a challenge. I stacked up bricks across an area as long as an outstretched strip of cloth, then dug trenches by each side of the stand. I got out some sticks the size of the trenches and used those to fix them in place. By covering the sticks in the sticky slime fluid, I could paste them to each end of the cloth. All I had to do was repeat this 45 times.

Once all the cloths were stuck in place, I ordered the sticky slimes to smear them with their fluids. I just had to watch out for any bugs or monsters that might show up throughout the process. I considered getting a door installed at some point. As I thought about possible renovations, I delivered orders to the stickies. I watched for a while, and the stands seemed to function as intended. The slimes were also diligent. That being the case, there was nothing for me to do. Had I been at the store, there would at least be some business I could attend to. Left with nothing else worth doing, I decided to train.



Three hours later...

I practiced all my hand-to-hand fighting skills and tried meditating, but the cloths still hadn't fully dried. I then decided to train the slimes as well. I used alchemy to dry the wood outside, then used a buzz saw and polish to create tons of sticks and practice spears. Now I could work on the staff and spear skills I learned the other day.



My training with the slimes reached a natural end, but the cloths looked like they needed a bit more time to dry. Maybe the cloth was too absorbent. This was the first time I tested it on such large cloths, so I didn't know.

I had nothing to do again, so I figured I would check out my status

board. My magic recovery speed level had increased by one, reaching Level 3. Putting my store together took a lot of magic, so that might have been why. My taming magic, alchemy, wind magic, and lightning magic levels had also gone up by one. I used those a fair bit too. That reminded me that Eliaria wanted to see a doll I made. Maybe I could make one now. I could just use some dirt lying around and make whatever I felt like.

“Create Block, Rock, Break Rock,” I chanted, preparing some rocks and simple tools. I used Break Rock to roughly shape the core of the doll from stone. Then I cast Playing Clay to give the dirt the consistency of clay and use it as putty to make the figure. I covered the core with it and used the tools to work on the details. That reminded me that I had some lime left over. I used it to coat the doll before I moved on to the coloring stage.

I cast Light to illuminate the mine shaft, using magic as necessary as I killed time making a bland doll. At least, that was my intention.

“All right! I ended up making a bunch of these,” I remarked. Next thing I knew, the doll was surrounded by more dolls. “What time is it? Wait, ack!”

It was almost sunset. I scrambled to collect all the dolls and dried cloths, then headed home. I expended too much magic energy, so it was a bit agonizing, but I had to hurry to get back before the sun set. I decided not to get too engrossed in my work while at the mine in the future. It was easy to forget the time as it was, and the passage of time wasn’t obvious from inside the mine. I reflected on my poor choices as the sun sank lower by the second. I ran toward town and repeatedly cast space magic.



“I’m exhausted,” I muttered. I somehow made it to the inn before the sun had set completely. After some brief rest, I went to give a report to Eliaria and the others. When I visited their room, Araune led me inside.

“Welcome, Ryoma.”

“It’s not often that you come to our room. Did something happen?”

“Nothing much, but I’ll start by talking about work,” I said, then described my deal with Serge. “I successfully produced 45 strips of waterproof cloth today, and it’s already been delivered to Serge’s store. I had my hands free for a lot of the time, so I’ll try gradually producing more each day to see how far I can take it.”

“I see, it sounds like there are no problems producing the waterproof cloth, then. Anything else?”

“My Lady wanted to see a doll, so I made some while waiting for

the cloths to dry.”

“Really? Show me, please!”

I opened my item box and took out various types of dolls. First, there was a bear that resembled a famous souvenir in my old world, but this was made of stone rather than wood.

“A black bear ornament, eh? And it looks like it’s in the middle of catching a fish.”

“These ones are so little and adorable!” Eliaria said of a set of cave bats, cave mantises, small rats, and other monsters that I designed as miniatures.

“Also, there’s these, the first ones I made,” I said and took out some ordinary human figures. I couldn’t think of anything else to base them on, so I modeled them after the four members of the duke’s family, as well as Sebas and the maids.

“Is this one me?”

“This is me.”

“I’m here too!”

“I, Sebas, Araune, and Lilian are here as well.”

“These dolls are quite elaborate. I knew that you made divine statues, but I must say your skills are magnificent.”

Seeing them so overjoyed was a bit new and exciting. In my old world, I never made anyone happy aside from Tabuchi. That reminded me that Tabuchi might have asked me for a figure before I died. I had no memory of what came of that.

“I didn’t have anyone else to model them after. I’m honored that you like them.”

“Ryoma, may I have this?”

“Take as many as you like.”

“Thank you!”

All this joy made these figures worth making. I considered trying to create something else sometime.

“If I ever have the chance to again, I’ll make more.”

“Please do.”

I chatted with them for a while, then returned to my room. When I headed back, Sebas said he would pay me for the dolls and presented ten medium gold coins, but that was more than I could accept for this work, so I rejected the offer. I only did it to kill time, the materials were cheap, and most of all, I couldn’t take a whole ten medium gold coins for a bunch of dolls. In the end, I accepted a fifth of that at two medium gold coins, but I didn’t feel quite right about that either.

“Quite a number of nobles would like statues of themselves to place in their homes or around town,” Sebas said. “If you made statues for them, I believe you’ll find that this money I’m paying you now is a paltry sum. You have enough talent to find work in that field, no

doubt.”

That sounded hard to believe, but when I got back to my room, I thought about what I should make while waiting for the cloths to dry tomorrow. I kept considering different ideas until I fell asleep.

Chapter 2 Episode 32: Slime Abnormality

The next day...

I went to the store first thing in the morning to confirm there were no problems, then went to the abandoned mine. I got started on the waterproof cloth production, but then I was left with nothing to do again. I fell asleep yesterday while I was thinking about what to do today, so nothing came to mind. In my past world, I would have read a book or played a video game to pass the time, but now I needed something else.

I received 45 strips of cloth today, the same as yesterday. My work was already over. I had gotten more used to it since yesterday and finished even faster than before. I didn't quite know what to do now, and I had already trained my slimes.

After some thought, I decided to gather my scavengers together into a king scavenger for me to fight one on one. My king scavenger slime had the following skills.

Skills: *Disease Resistance 7, Poison Resistance 7, Foul Feeder 8, Cleanse 8, Deodorize 8, Deodorant Solution 6, Stench Release 8, Nutrient Reduction 7, Physical Attack Resistance 5, Maximize 5, Minimize 6, Jump 3, Gluttony 4, Unarmed Combat 2*

The Physical Attack Resistance that the scavengers had meant that the king scavenger had the same skill one level higher. Scavengers also had an Unarmed Combat level of only 1, but king scavengers had it at 2. Compared to individual scavengers, its skill level was higher all around. I couldn't be sure of this, but maybe when they combined, the experience of each slime mixed together or something.

When I fought the king scavenger, its Physical Attack Resistance was highly effective and my attacks hardly worked. Its elasticity had increased enough for attacks to bounce right off. Its skills weren't especially honed yet, but its defenses were excellent.

For example, when I hit the king scavenger with a serious punch, it endured the blow entirely. Of course, I avoided hitting the core just to be safe, but piercing through the slime took a lot of time and effort.

But its downside was its low attack power. It could use Maximize to grow and increase its mass to crush enemies, but lacked in muscle

strength, if that was a thing that slimes had at all. I could just shake it off if I wanted to, and its strike attacks didn't pack a punch.

This was to be expected, so I considered having it stretch its body into tentacles to use like whips to attack or ensnare opponents. It could use their momentum against them, take advantage of its own elasticity and use its Maximize ability to perform a sort of shoulder throw. I taught it these and a few other skills I came up with. The basic strategy I had it use was to protect itself from enemy attacks, then use the force of their strikes to throw them and, once they fell on the ground, use Maximize to crush them.

This took a fair amount of time, but still not enough for the cloths to dry. They were nearly ready, so I figured I could take a walk with my slimes, and they'd be finished by the time I was done.

I got my slimes together and was about to go outside, but then one of the slimes I made a contract with began to behave strangely. The effects of the taming contract gave me some grasp on the situation, but I didn't know what was happening.

When I reached the slime in question, I found it was one that I captured for my metal slime evolution experiment. It was jiggling, but didn't seem ill. That could only mean one thing.

"Evolution?!" I shouted. I thought maybe I was getting ahead of myself, but it was the only answer I could come up with. I watched in silence until the slime went still, at which time I sensed a bit of magic energy that it seemed to be releasing. But it wasn't using magic. In fact, it seemed to absorb all the energy it released. For what purpose, I didn't know. Maybe it was required for evolution, or maybe it was doing it unconsciously.

The magic energy entered and exited its body dozens of times, during which the slime steadily changed color. It ultimately turned silver, which I could only guess meant it had safely evolved. It seemed to be acting normal now. But metal slimes were supposed to be more of a dark gray color, while this slime was a bright silver. I used my Monster Appraisal skill.

Iron Slime

Skills: *Harden 3, Physical Attack Resistance 2, Jump 1, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 2*

It was called an iron slime. Its skills seemed the same as a metal slime's, but its Harden skill was one level higher. This happened because I fed it iron, I presumed.

"But metal slimes eat iron too, right?" I asked myself. If they consume the same food, why did mine turn out this way? "Iron is just one type of metal, so maybe metal slimes need more varieties!"

I took out some stone meant to be fed to metal slimes and appraised it.

Stone (Red Clay)

Dirt and sediment found in a mine and consolidated with earth magic.

Contains the following metals: iron oxide, aluminum oxide

As I thought, red clay contained aluminum oxide. It reminded me of a part time job I had in road construction, and a conversation I had with a coworker about this subject.

“Metal slimes don’t just eat iron, but aluminum too. Maybe some other metals too,” I said. I used alchemy to extract iron and aluminum from some bricks, then called my iron slime and metal slime over, splitting up the materials between the two of them. The iron slime only ate iron, but the metal slime ate both types of metal. I called the metal slime closer and petted it.

“So you’ll eat anything that’s metal? Seems like it. The iron slime’s just made of metal, I’m sure, but what about you? Some combination of iron and aluminum or what?” I asked the metal slime, but got no answer, of course. “Well, at least I know how to evolve you now. That was the first time I saw a slime evolve.”

Every time prior to this, they evolved while I was asleep for some reason. If you feed slimes well enough, they tend to evolve within half a year, but you never know exactly when it will happen, and staying up every night to keep an eye on them wouldn’t be easy. Now I knew that they spat up and sucked in magic energy while they evolved. It was fascinating, but I worried that I might be late to get home again if I thought about it for too long.

“That reminds me, I think I’ve figured out this Appraisal spell a bit better,” I said to redirect my thoughts. The non-elemental spell known as Appraisal produced information similar to that of an internet search. When I used it out of curiosity before, all that popped up was a name. Later when I tried to get detailed information out of it, it only returned simple data.

But when I was cleaning the pit toilet the other day and used Appraisal on the roof, it showed me the word ‘Disinfection.’ Using it on filth presented me with the word ‘Germs.’ It was probably based on the user’s knowledge, so depending on how much you know, the information provided could be different.

I tried it a few more times and learned that to check something in detail, you need to think about whatever details you want to know in a way that can be understood with your own knowledge if you want the best results. For example, I wondered about the weight of this red clay and the percentage of it that was composed of iron and

aluminum.

503.9g Stone (Red Clay)

Dirt and sediment found in a mine and consolidated with earth magic.

Contains the following metals: iron oxide (4.2%, 21.1638g), aluminum oxide (5.1%, 25.6989g)

Now I got this much detail, likely because my thoughts were more detailed when I cast the spell. This seemed useful, though I didn't know to what extent. It was nice that I could get more detailed information, but I didn't especially need it at the moment. Maybe I could use it to sort the iron ingots I brought to Serge by weight next time. Or maybe I could ask Serge for some of the highest quality iron ingots in this world and create my own based off of them. It would be worth it if that meant the ingots I made didn't stand out anymore, but there didn't seem to be much use for Appraisal for the time being. The way it worked so far was good enough anyway.

As I waited for the waterproof cloths to dry, I practiced making 500g, 80% pure iron and aluminum ingots over and over. When the cloths dried, I gathered them together, returned to town, and delivered them to Serge's store. After that, I received another 300 strips of cloth and went back to the inn, but it wasn't quite time for bed, so then I headed to my store. It was too late to accept any jobs at the guild, so I decided to check on my employees.



When I got to the store, the same hordes of people were there. There might even have been more customers now. I used the employee entrance to enter the break room, but nobody was there. Maybe everyone had to work to keep up with all the business. I opened the door to the store area and found Fina, one of the trio of girls.

"Boss, it's nice to see you," she said.

"Nice to see you, too. I noticed nobody was in the break room. Is everyone busy?"

"There's not a lot of free time, but I wouldn't say we're that busy. At least we have plenty of employees. We figured out when we get the most customers, so everyone's doing their part to deal with the big rush."

Everyone got used to the job while I was away. It looked like I didn't have much to worry about. But then I noticed something and gasped.

"What's wrong?" Fina asked.

"The cleaner slimes are ready to split."

“Huh?”

Cleaner slimes used this method of cleaning as a way of getting food as well, so all the sustenance they had been getting every day put them in a state where they could divide.

“We’re going to get more slimes that can clean. That’ll improve our cleaning efficiency,” I said.

“Really?! Wow!”

“Thank the slimes for a job well done. I’ll be over here for a while, but don’t mind me.”

“Okay!” Fina said and ran off with some finished laundry. Now it was time for me to do my part.



I made a contract with the new slimes, now having a total of 54 cleaner slimes. Cleaner slimes didn’t divide that often, but a whole ten of them multiplied twice. It must have been because of the job they were doing. Also, when I had the cleaner slimes divide, their increased numbers helped them work that much faster. Their work rate had more than doubled. There was no way I could let this efficiency go to waste.

“Oh, perfect timing, Fina. You too, Carme,” I said when they came to get laundry. I summed up the situation for them and suggested that they go help take orders from customers. I had previously told everyone taking orders from customers to also take and return their laundry, but with the additional manpower we now had, I also suggested we divide up the work between us.

“I’ll carry the laundry around, you two return it to the customers.”

“To increase efficiency, I assume? Let’s try it.”

With that, the two of them went out front. I gathered up the finished laundry and brought it out as well.

“Next customer!”

“This way, please!”

“Customer #18.”

“How does it look?”

“Oh my, it’s so clean. And it was all affordable too. Very nice.”

“Thank you! Please come again! Next, Customer #8!”

A few minutes after we divided up our work, the flow of customers had become noticeably faster. Maybe the slimes were hungry after they had just split up. It felt like they were working more vigorously than before. There were times that we almost ran out of numbered signs for the customers, and we had more people waiting for their laundry to be returned too, but a temporary return to the way we took orders from customers before solved that. The increased number of cleaner slimes and service windows raised the speed at

which we could process orders and serve the customers. Eventually we got through peak business hours and reached closing time in one piece.

Chapter 2 Episode 33: After Hours

I was giving water to the cleaner slimes that cleaned up the store when Carla came to me with a sales report. Compared to previous reports, her attitude was somehow different.

“Boss, about today’s sales...”

“What’s wrong? Are we in the red?”

“No, we’re in the black.”

“Then did we make a decent profit again?”

“We made quite a different amount than we have so far, Master Ryoma. Today alone, we earned 26036 sute.”

“Now hold on a second. For the last couple days, we made just over 16000, right? Why are we suddenly earning 10000 more than that?”

“Just after you left the store this morning, we happened to receive some great contracts. The rumors about our store reached the ears of the blacksmiths, carpenters, and metal workers. They came to buy large bags and used them immediately. Not only that, but we’re getting more customers, both individuals and groups. A fair number of customers are asking to have multiple bags of laundry done at once, too. The bags are still continuing to sell.”

“Can you give me more details about our sales? Not that I doubt the numbers, but I’d like to see the facts for myself.”

“Of course. Wait in the office, please. I’ll bring the summary to you right away.”

I did as told and went to the office, where I sat in my chair and waited. This was my first time using the place. I was always either carrying laundry, taking orders, or resting in the break room. While I was pondering this, Carla came to me with a sheet of paper.

“Here are today’s sales numbers,” she said.

“Thank you.”

Carla had written down the individual sales for everything we offered. I took a look.

Laundry for 1: $998 \times 10 \text{ sute} = 9980 \text{ sute}$

Laundry for 14: $152 \times 18 \text{ sute} = 2736 \text{ sute}$

Laundry for 35: $55 \times 40 \text{ sute} = 2200 \text{ sute}$

Bag for 1: $159 \times 20 \text{ sute} = 3180 \text{ sute}$

Bag for 14: $68 \times 25 \text{ sute} = 1700 \text{ sute}$

Bag for 35: 50 x 30 sute = 1500 sute

Equipment cleaning service: 316 x 15 sute = 4740 sute

That added up to 26036 sute, for certain.

“Looks accurate. I’m surprised we made so much. Seriously,” I said. Even if the bags weren’t selling still, we would have made close to 20000 sute. It was all thanks to the cleaner slimes and my employees. “That reminds me, where’s everyone else?”

“They’re confirming our sales in the break room.”

“What do you mean by confirming our sales?”

“We receive a mix of small and medium bronze coins, so we sort them out to see if they match our projected earnings.”

“I see, then I’ll help.”

“No, this is a job for your employees.”

“That doesn’t mean I’m not allowed to join in, does it? I may be the boss, but I’m also your coworker. I’ll help.”

When it came to this sort of office work, though, the twins were beyond incredible. I wouldn’t say I had no work to do, but I had very little. Their support was also excellent, so it tended to end before I knew it. I always had to rely on energy drinks to get through work like this, so I couldn’t keep up.

“Understood. But Master Ryoma, you’re the boss of this store, and not just because you hold that title,” Carla said, then attended me to the break room. Which wasn’t especially necessary, because it was only a few steps away.

“Good work today, everyone.”

“Thank you, Boss,” my employees responded. They were counting the large pile of bronze coins on the break room’s big table. They did it by hand, counting one by one.

“No, thank you for running the shop without me every day. It helps a lot.”

“It’s nothing!” Maria said. “The working conditions here are great!”

“What she said, Master Ryoma,” Carme agreed. “That’s the whole point of hiring employees. It’s only natural.” The other employees nodded, including Carla as she stood behind me.

“I see, I’m glad you feel that way. Let’s get back to work, then. We just need to count the total value of these bronze coins, right?”

“Yes, but we could do this by ourselves.”

“The more, the merrier. Besides, that’s a ton of coins,” I pointed out. Today’s sales added up to 26036 sute, all of which was made up of small or medium bronze coins, which is to say 1 sute or 10 sute. That meant loads of bronze coins. They were to be stored in the underground vault once the total was confirmed, after which it would

periodically be added to a bank account the Merchant's Guild set up, but that sounded rough too.

"Then come over here, please."

"There's an open seat next to me."

"Thanks."

I sat next to Fay and counted the bronze coins. This seemed like it would take a while by hand, but at least there were eight of us to make it faster.

After about a minute of work, I had an idea. Rather, I remembered an idea. I took the bag of lime out of my item box, drawing everyone's attention toward me, but I ignored them and appraised a small bronze coin to see its thickness and diameter.

Small Bronze Coin: 1 Sute

The coin with the lowest value. Made of bronze. Diameter: 0.9cm, Thickness: 2mm

I had to amend what I said about Appraisal that afternoon. Maybe it was surprisingly useful.

"Boss? What are you doing?" Fay asked. "Appraising a coin? It's not fake, is it?"

"No, I was thinking I'd make a little tool."

"What kind of tool?"

"Watch. 'Create Block.'"

I turned some lime into a long stone that was hollow on the inside, like a box. Then I cast Break Rock to take part of it off so that if I tilted the box, anything inside it would fall out. Next, I used earth magic on the hollow area to create lines marking a 5 x 10 grid of 1cm square panels. The lines were 2mm tall, so each panel could contain one bronze coin. Lastly, I used a sticky slime's hardening solution to lightly coat the box so that it could be safely touched with bare hands. It also served to prevent scratches. I appraised the box.

Coin Counter: L 14cm, W 7cm, H 1cm

Used in the Edo period to count coins. Created by consolidating lime with earth magic.

It was done.

"Boss, what's that?"

"You use it like this," I said and tossed a couple handfuls of small bronze coins inside the box, then held it from each end and shook it around for a few seconds. I heard the coins clatter. When I let go, some of the coins fell out, but there was a coin left in each of the panels.

“Fay, can you count how many coins are left inside?”

“Sure, I will,” Fay said and looked closely. “Fifty exactly. Boss, that’s another useful tool you’ve made for yourself.”

Carme, Carla, and Lilyn seemed to realize the purpose of the box as well. The three village girls, however, did not, so I had them count the coins next. I put more small bronze coins in the box, shook it, and handed out the remaining coins to the three girls to help them understand.

Jane was cheerful and passionate about work, but not always the best thinker, so she took a bit longer than the rest. Once everyone got it, though, I began to produce more coin counters. I made eight boxes for a set of fifty small bronze coins and another eight boxes for a set of a hundred medium bronze coins, enough for everyone. Normal coin counters were supposed to work for any type of coin, but I could figure out how to design them that way later.

Thanks to the coin counters, we finished the job in less than ten minutes. It turned out that we mostly had small bronze coins. I thought there were more medium bronze coins, but the majority of customers seemed to pay in the small variety. After that, I asked everyone if there were any issues running the store.

“Issues?”

“Not really!”

“This is a great place to work. I can’t complain.”

“If anyone can complain about the conditions here, they must be pretty spoiled.”

“Really? It doesn’t pay great!”

Suddenly, I realized I didn’t give my employees a break. How could I say I offer work benefits if I didn’t even do that?

“What’s wrong, Boss? You look sick all of a sudden.”

“I forgot you were supposed to get a day off,” I said, but nobody could believe their ears.

“Boss!” Jane shouted. “We even get specific days off?!” I thought that went without saying, but I also only just remembered that, so I was in no place to talk. The others were looking at me with similar surprise.

“You should get at least one day off per week. We can either be closed one day a week, or you can all take turns having days off,” I said. The three village girls were overjoyed. I was confused by their reaction, so Carla explained for me.

“Boss, people who work away from their hometown seldom get to take days off. If they don’t have any particular skills, they tend to be given menial labor and worked to the bone. Their salaries are also relatively low. But the conditions here are good, and you pay them well. Considering all the other benefits, I think it’s typical to expect no

days off as a trade-off.”

“Employees at smaller businesses don’t get days off in general, unless there’s a holiday or other celebration. Days off are bad for business, so it’s common for employees to have to work every day. Especially for new businesses, it’s typical to have no time off until they get on track.” Those businesses didn’t sound very well set up if they couldn’t even have days off without endangering themselves. But there were always businesses like that.

“Before we left our village, our families felt so sorry for us! They thought they were giving us a brutal job to do.”

“If we were unlucky enough to end up with a cruel employer, we might’ve been worked to death for bad pay. Even worse, I’ve heard some bad sexual abuse stories.”

“You were worried about that?” I asked. Apparently the workers in this world were treated terribly. I looked to Carla for an answer.

“Employers taking advantage of their employees for sex is against the law, but unfortunately, some employers do it regardless. It’s one of the things that prospective employees have to watch out for,” she said. There was sexual harassment and such in my old world too. For as different as this world was, I guess some things always stayed the same.

“I want to create a healthy environment where we value our employees, so don’t worry about that,” I said. Everyone smiled and thanked me. As far as vacation days, they said it would be a waste to close the store on any day when there was such a deluge of customers, so we decided that employees should take turns taking days off. We discussed this as we ate the dinner Chelma cooked up. Around 9PM, I noticed how late it was, said goodbye, and left the store. It was so late that I feared they may get mad at me.



By the time I got to the inn, Eliaria and the others were already back. As we spoke over tea, I learned that they received a warm reception from the government office today. The newly appointed manager had arrived, and the remaining people of the office that had caused the scandals tried to get on the family’s good side, but their flattery was ineffective. I could imagine a luxurious welcoming party taking place right next to a trial. That may in fact have been close to what happened.

Reinbach and Sebas were the ones who told me this, but everyone else seemed ready for bed. It looked like it would bother them if I stayed too long, so I decided to leave for the day.

Chapter 2 Episode 34: Nice Find

The next day...

“Ugh, I have a headache.”

I didn’t spend time with Eliaria and the others yesterday, so I went to check on them in their room and found that Reinhart had a hangover.

“Oh, Ryoma, good morning.”

“Good morning, everyone.”

“Ryoma...”

“Looks like you’re having a rough time. Should I make you some medicine or something?”

“As long as you’re offering, could you do that?”

I used Warp to travel to different stores around town and pick up ingredients for medicine that would help with hangovers, as well as fruit that could be eaten along with it. I bought what I needed and returned to the inn.

“Here, drink this. You should also make sure to stay hydrated,” I said. If only there had been persimmons for sale. That or some miso soup with clams. Plenty of people traveled from my world to this one, so they had to be available somewhere. Maybe it would be worth searching for them at some point.

“Thank you, don’t mind if I do,” Reinhart replied.

“I suggest not taking too much medicine, though.”

“Sorry I’m in such a sorry state. Yesterday I— Agh, my head...”

Reinhart sounded like he was in agony and desperate for relief. At yesterday’s banquet at the government office, they tried to get on Reinbach, Reinhart, and even Elise and Eliaria’s good side by offering loads of food and alcohol. Elise was fine, but Eliaria wasn’t used to such events. While she was dealing with their approaches, Reinhart went off and drank too much, according to him.

Hearing about the banquet made me a bit uneasy. I didn’t know if Eliaria could handle these occasions. She would presumably have to go to more when she grew up, too. Thanks to Tekun’s blessing, I didn’t get too drunk or get hangovers, at least. I still didn’t know exactly how much I could drink now, but I also had experience from my past life. Maybe it would be best to test just how much I could drink at least once. I thought about this as I watched Reinhart drink the medicine and juice, then left the inn.



I got to my store a little late, briefly checked in with everyone, then left. There didn't seem to be any problems. After that, I shifted gears and headed to the abandoned mine. There was something I wanted to test out, so I hoped to catch some slimes on the way there. Maybe we could pick herbs together too.

"Hello, Maylene."

"Oh, Ryoma, working for the guild today?"

"Yes, I've left my store in the hands of my employees at this point."

"Owning a store and hiring people to run it for you at your age is a big step up in life."

"I just got lucky."

"I'm sure there's more to it than that. Oh, this isn't a job or anything, but I have some information that might interest you. A party of five adventurers traveled here from another town, and they brought a high-ranking slime with them."

"Can you tell me more?"

"If you capture a rare monster or obtain elusive information, selling it to the Tamer's Guild earns you a tidy profit. This party happened across this slime, and they tried to sell it. There aren't many high-ranking slimes, you see. But the guild didn't want it. Slimes that can use magic, like your healing slime for example, are both rare and useful, so they go for a high price. The slime these people caught was different, presumably. They're still young, and it sounds like they made a mistake when they were gathering info in advance. They thought they'd get good money for a high-ranking slime, but they were disappointed when that didn't happen, from what it seems like."

"So for enough money, I can buy this rare slime off them?"

"That's right. Do you want it?"

"I do, very much so. Do you know where that party is?"

"They should be staying at a cheap inn called the Badger Inn on the east side of town. Their party's called Sikum's Pier. Just tell the innkeeper the name and you'll probably get to talk to them."

"Thank you, I'll go there right away."

I rushed out of the guild and hurried toward the Badger Inn. I had a change of plans.



"Is this it?" I asked myself. The Badger Inn was easy enough to find, but it looked utterly decrepit from the outside. I would've thought it was abandoned. I entered the building anyway and found a clearly middle-aged man at the counter.

“Welcome. You a customer?”

“I have business with Sikum’s Pier, an adventuring party staying at this inn. Are they here right now?”

“Sure are,” he said and pointed to a door on the right. “There’s a dining hall/bar in there where they should be eating. One of them’s been drinking since noon and complaining the whole time, so watch out for that one.”

“Thank you.”

He was blunt, but a nice enough person. I opened the door and entered the dining hall. There were only five people there, so I knew they were the party in question right away. They all looked to be in their late teens.

“Excuse me, are you a party called Sikum’s Pier?” I asked. They turned to look at me.

“Hm? Who are you?”

“Sorry, I should have introduced myself first. I’m Ryoma Takebayashi, a tamer and adventurer.”

“Humph! A little snot like you’s an adventurer?”

“Quit it, Thane. Sorry, he’s in a bad mood.”

“I know what happened. You took a rare slime to the Tamer’s Guild, but they didn’t buy it, I believe.”

“Yes, and then—”

“Agh, what the hell’s your problem?! You wanna start a fight?!” Thane screamed, stood up, and tried to walk toward me, but his party members stopped him.

“No, I’m not looking for a fight.”

“What? Then you’re making fun of me, you little piss stain?! Even this brat’s doing it, damn it! Yeah, it’s true! We’re idiots! Came all the way here thinking we could sell a rare monster for big money, only to not be able to sell it! We spent a lot and gained nothing! But why’d you have to come rub it in?!” Thane shouted, then broke down crying. He was completely drunk and seemed to have a severe persecution complex.

“Thane.”

“Chill out.”

“I’ll take Thane back to the room. There’s no use talking to him like this.”

“I’ll go with.”

Two of the other adventurers took Thane away.

“Anyway, we’re Sikum’s Pier. I’m the leader, Shin.”

“I’m Kai. Sorry about Thane.”

“It’s fine.”

“That’s good to hear. So, you wanted something from us?”

Yes, that was the important thing. The drunk adventurer didn’t

matter.

“Yes, I was wondering if I could buy that slime off you.”

“The one we couldn’t sell before?”

“We’d appreciate it, but why? The guys at the Tamer’s Guild laughed at the thing.”

“I collect and research slimes. If you have a rare one, I’d love to have it.”

“Weird. But like Kai said, it’d be nice if someone buys it.”

“You’ll sell it to me, won’t you? How much do you want?”

“Well, why don’t you decide? The Tamer’s Guild said it was worthless, so it’d be hard for us to put a price on it.”

“Just pay whatever you want, we’ve got nothing to lose. We were just going to get rid of it tomorrow anyway.”

“I see, then can you show it to me? I won’t spend much on a slime I already have, but if it’s one I don’t have yet, I’ll pay good money.”

“Fine by me.”

“I’ll bring it out right now, one second.”

Kai left his seat, and three minutes later, he returned with a stone box.

“The slime’s in here. Be careful.”

“Excuse me,” I said and cautiously opened the lid to see the slime inside. It was dark red and runnier than the average slime, closer to a pure liquid. After I got a good look, I closed the lid.

“Well?”

“I don’t have a slime like this. I’ll buy it for a high price. If you don’t mind me asking, how much did it cost you to travel here?”

“About 5000 sute between the five of us. We kept the expenses as low as possible, but it still wasn’t cheap.”

I took two small gold coins out of my item box.

“Then including the cost of traveling back, it’ll add up to 10000. I’ll cover that cost for you, and pay another 10000 sute for the slime,” I said. The two adventurers panicked.

“Seriously?! That’s 20000 in all.”

“Two small gold coins for a single slime? You really want to pay that much?”

“It’s fine, I’m getting a new slime thanks to the five of you.”

“I see. Well, I don’t have any complaints. What about you?”

“Course not.”

“Then here you are,” I said and placed the money in Shin’s outstretched hand.

“Thanks.”

“I’ll be taking the slime, then. Thank you.”

“We’re the ones who should thank you.”

“That takes care of our money troubles for the time being. Thane

should probably calm down too.”

I did sort of understand how he felt. A lack of money can cause extreme anxiety. I’ve been in the same position in the past. Which reminded me, a job for a lot of money was supposed to show up at the guild soon.

“If you want to make money, I think it might be a good idea to stay in this town for a while. Every year around this season, there’s a huge outbreak of monsters at a nearby swamp. From what I hear, those monsters can be hunted as ingredients for medicine and sold for a high price. As long as you can tolerate the stench of the swamp, it’s supposed to be a pretty profitable job.”

“Really?”

“Yes, check with the guild. I don’t know exactly when the outbreak happens, but it’s supposed to be coming up.”

“Thanks for the advice!”

“That’s great info, thank you. Is there anything we can do to pay you back?”

There was nothing I needed, but this was a good opportunity to do some advertising.

“Come visit my store sometime. I run a laundromat on the side. It’s gotten to be a bit more than a side job, though.”

“A laundromat?”

“Yes, you buy one of the bags we sell and fill it with as much laundry as you can, and we’ll wash it all for one medium bronze coin. Also, for adventurers, you can pay one medium bronze coin and one small bronze coin to have your armor and equipment cleaned.”

“Never heard of any stores like that.”

“Got it, sounds cheap. I’ll give it a try.”

“Thank you. You can find it just outside the residential district on the east side of town. A lot of our customers are adventurers, so if you ask around, I’m sure someone will give you directions.”

“We’ll go there for sure.”

“Thanks, we’re glad to have you.”

After that, I hurried to the mine. I didn’t have to worry about my surroundings there; it was the perfect place to research slimes.



I arrived at the mine. As long as I was there, I decided to make waterproof cloth as well. Today I made fifty strips. Once I finished my other business, it was finally time to make a contract with my new slime. I opened the lid of the stone box and stared at the slime as I cast the contract spell. Its liquid body violently rippled for a moment, then gradually went still. The contract was a success. I used Monster Appraisal.

Bloody Slime

Skills: *Suck Blood 4, Deodorize 3, Disease Resistance 3, Poison Resistance 1, Play Dead 10, Consume 2, Absorb 4, Split 1*

Looking at the Suck Blood skill, I had to imagine this slime's main form of sustenance was blood. It also had Deodorize and Disease Resistance, along with a low level version of Poison Resistance. I wasn't sure exactly how Play Dead worked, but I could figure it out later. Feeding it was the big problem. If it ate blood, I didn't know what to do about that.

"Maybe I could hunt some random beasts or monsters," I thought. I told my slimes that I had to go somewhere far away and they could do as they liked while I was gone, then brought the bloody slime with me to go hunting. Dozens of slimes picked up practice clubs and spears to start practicing on their own. I only left them behind for their protection, but apparently I had some pretty passionate slimes. Some of them practiced the club, spear, and unarmed attacks I taught them, and the pairs of two that had matches with each other seemed to be getting better by the day. It was nice, but it didn't seem like normal slime behavior.

I still had my questions about that as I looked around for animals. Eventually, I found a horned rabbit. I took a bow and arrows out of my item box, swiftly killed the rabbit, and told the bloody slime it was fine to eat it. The slime oozed toward it like flowing blood and began to suck blood from the wound. It was similar to the mosquitoes and fleas we had on Earth. There were also types of birds that sucked blood, so maybe it was something like that.

I watched the bloody slime's behavior and made guesses about its biology until the slime's already liquid body became even more fluid and entered the horned rabbit through its wound. I wasn't expecting that. Bloody slimes were apparently unique in that they could change their viscosity to something closer to water. That allowed them to enter a creature's veins and suck their blood from within. It was like no slime I had ever seen before.



While I was still paralyzed by the bloody slime's shocking behavior, it appeared to finish drinking and exited the horned rabbit's body. Its body was dark red, so it looked like the rabbit was gushing blood in an unsettling fashion. Once I confirmed the bloody slime was fully out of the rabbit, I appraised the corpse.

Horned Rabbit Corpse

Its horns, flesh, and skin can be stripped off and collected.

An arrow to the neck killed it in one shot, so the horns and skin have taken minimal damage and are of high quality.

All the blood was drained from its body shortly after death, greatly reducing the stench. Its flesh is of the highest quality.

I understood the part about the horns and skin, but I was surprised to learn there was no blood left at all. Maybe the bloody slime did drink a full rabbit's worth of blood, but it could also have been sick. I used Appraisal again, but it wasn't ill or anything. This slime seemed incredibly convenient for adventurers and hunters.

I went back to the mine and dissected the horned rabbit. When I cooked and ate the meat, it turned out to be true that it didn't stink, and it tasted great too. The lack of stench may have been thanks to the Deodorize skill. The bloody slime's skills seemed useful and worth the price I paid.

But if I wanted to go out of my way to evolve the bloody slime, I would presumably need to feed it tons of blood. For experimentation purposes, I would need a lot of blood anyway, but I couldn't go around hunting all the beasts and monsters in the area. My slimes could probably collect plenty if I mobilized them all, but that could destabilize the ecosystem and take work away from other adventurers.

In the end, I decided to talk to Sieg about it. Animal blood was sometimes used in cooking on Earth, but not in this world. The reason for that was the magic energy of a creature was contained in its blood. Drinking that blood would cause a human to take in that energy and enter a state called magic drunkenness caused by taking in too much. Much like a magic energy deficiency, it wasn't something that demanded treatment, but it was best to avoid if at all possible.

Sieg was a butcher, and he said he bought meat off of adventurers. If he drained blood at his store, maybe I could take the blood off his hands. I planned on giving him a visit when I got back to town. Later, when I was about to return to the mine, I remembered that I was going to capture some slimes. I caught three inside the mine and successfully made a contract with them. The cloths hadn't dried yet, so I decided to start an experiment.

Chapter 2 Episode 35: Food Preparation

I relaxed my breathing, then unleashed magic energy toward three of my slimes. The slimes quivered and leaped at the energy. I sensed their joy. At first glance, it only looked like they were trembling, but my Magic Detection skill allowed me to see that the slimes were slowly taking in the energy, confirming my suspicions.

When I saw an evolving slime releasing and absorbing magic energy yesterday, I had an idea regarding magic energy and slimes. Firstly, healing slimes could use recovery magic, so there was no doubt that they possessed magic energy. The cause of their evolution into healing slimes was also recovery magic, I believed. I recalled that at the time I thought maybe slimes could also use fire and water magic, and I experimented with that too. That only resulted in harming slimes with offensive magic, so I ended the experiment early, but I wondered if it would be different now.

Slimes capable of using other types of magic must have been possible, considering the existence of healing slimes. After what I heard from Maylene the other day, I was confident in this assertion. There was plenty of reason to believe these slimes could be obtained through evolution in the same fashion as I had done so far, by feeding them. Maybe feeding slimes magic energy would do the trick.

I released more magic energy. This time I did what I would when using fire magic, imagining the energy as a fiery explosion. Different people imagined different things when casting spells, from what I had heard, but this was a way to turn the non-elemental magic energy contained within the human body into fire energy for use in fire magic. All elemental magic required this conversion technique, but the conversion process usually also caused the magic to be unleashed at the same time. This was my first time stopping short of casting the spell itself and simply releasing the transformed energy. It demanded more precision than using magic normally, but that may have been because I wasn't accustomed to this.

Curious as to whether they would like non-elemental energy, I released it as-is. The slimes didn't seem to absorb as much as before. I tested other elements and discovered that two of the three slimes took in a greater quantity of earth energy, while one of them preferred dark energy. Individual slimes appeared to have preferences when it came

to elements. Maybe different magic energy had different flavors. In any case, the slimes were enjoying it, so I continued.

By the time the cloths dried, I had given them almost all of my magic energy. I took some time to rest before I collected the dried waterproof cloths, then returned to town and headed to Sieg's butcher shop.



"Hey there! Here for some meat?" a boy in his teens asked me when I got to the butcher. From the look of it, he was around fourteen or fifteen.

"Excuse me, but I wanted to talk to Sieg. Is he available?"

"Oh, huh. Boss! Customer wants to see you!" the boy shouted. Sieg walked over from the work space in the back of the store, his clothes messy with blood. His skin was pale and he was so thin as to look sickly as well. He looked as frightening as Worgan, albeit in a different way.

"If it isn't Ryoma? Need something?"

"Yes, actually," I said and explained the situation, then made my request.

"I see, didn't know there were slimes like that. Sure, need some blood right away? Some young adventurers did a ton of hunting today, so I've got plenty on hand."

"Thank you, I'll take it."

Sieg let me into his work space where five men were working. Everything from the walls to the ceiling was covered in hooks and strings from which bloody beasts dangled.

"Over here," Sieg said and led me right below the animals. There were two large containers full of blood that were each about the length of the room itself.

"Thank you. Would you mind if it drinks right from these containers?"

"That's fine."

With Sieg's permission, I put the bloody slime in a container. It rapidly drained the blood until nothing was left.

"Wow, that thing's convenient."

"You think so too, Sieg?"

"We have to pump all the blood out of those tubs and thoroughly clean them out. You can see how big they are, so it's a lot of work."

"Especially when we get a big animal, or tons of small animals to drain like today, it's a lot of work and a huge pain."

"I see."

Even the nearby workers began to complain about how much effort it involved. I also asked if blood was used in any cooking.

“Blood as food? Not that I’ve ever heard of.”

“Everyone throws blood away, that’s just common sense.”

“If it’s edible, I feel like that’s a waste, though.”

“I’ve heard that the magic energy in blood goes away if it’s left alone long enough. But by then it’d be dry or rotten, so you can’t eat it anyway.”

Blood with magic energy wasn’t much more than a toxin, apparently. After that, Sieg and the other workers said I could come back any time I needed blood, and I could even have their bones and any meat that went bad before they could sell it. They were generous enough to give me anything that would have been trash anyway. Now I could get food for my scavenger and acid slimes too.

“Thank you!” I said, glad I got more than I was expecting. I left the butcher and saw some rowdy men being taken away from my store by city guards.

“Get walking!”

“Ouch!”

“Hey, the hell are you looking at?!”

“Nothing to see here!”

“Shut up and walk!”

Wondering what happened, I dashed to my store and found all my employees gathered together.

“Is everyone all right?!”

“Oh, Boss!”

“I saw some guards dragging some men out of the store. Anyway, is anyone hurt?”

“We’re fine! Nobody’s been injured!”

“Fay stopped them all by himself!”

“Really? Thank you, Fay.”

“It was nothing. Just part of the job.”

“Fay and Lilyn really helped today. Of course, you’re the one who hired them, Master Ryoma. You’re partially to thank for the safety of the store and our staff.”

“No, no, I didn’t do anything,” I admitted. I didn’t even get there until after it happened.

“Boss, I want to talk to you for a bit,” Lilyn said. “We need to put countermeasures in place in case this happens again.”

I left Fay and the three village girls in charge of the store, then the reliable twins and I went to the office.

“Although for now, we don’t have any problems. Not as long as I or my father are at the store. Either of us can handle any number of hoodlums on our own. But there is one thing I want to ask you, Boss. Is there anyone who’d hold a grudge against you?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Seems like someone hired those thugs. We used a truth serum on them before the guards showed up, so this has to be correct.”

“They were hired? Well, there were these criminal adventurers trying to steal from kids. I beat them up, so I guess it could be them.”

I hid away in the forest until I came here, and I lived in another world entirely before that. I had only met good people for the most part since I arrived in town, and never got on anyone’s bad side that I could recall. The only real strife that happened involved those adventurers.

“The hoodlums said they were paid handsomely for a relatively minor job.”

“What was their job, exactly?”

“They were supposed to intimidate customers around here, but that was all.”

“Fay noticed this and restrained them, however.”

Their goal wasn’t to destroy the store or harm employees, but simply to obstruct business, it seemed.

“I have no idea who might have hired them, then.”

“Maybe someone envies you. You did come out of nowhere and become an instant success, after all.”

“There are people like that everywhere. At any rate, let’s be cautious.”

“It would have been nice if the hoodlums knew anything, but whoever hired them was careful not to reveal their identity.”

“This tends to happen when there’s profit to be made. All we can do is prepare for such an eventuality.”

Carla and Carme informed Serge and the guildmaster of the Merchant’s Guild about this incident, while I relayed this information to the duke’s family. After that, I decided to have Fay and Lilyn watch the store during the day, while the slimes would be left to stand guard at night. Then I returned to the inn and talked to Reinhart. He suggested that the duke’s family could hire guards for the store, taking the matter very seriously.

The only ones that could be hired right away were ex-soldiers or ex-knights. He said he would introduce me to some who retired or left their positions after sustaining injuries, but still had some combat talent. But they all seemed too overqualified to work at my store. The strongest of everyone he introduced me to, by the way was a retired knight captain that fought alongside Reinbach. The idea of hiring him sounded ludicrous.

After taking the time to talk it out with him, we decided to wait and see what happens for the time being. So much had happened that I didn’t even think about this truth serum that Lilyn and Fay had on them. I had no idea about those, but it helped to have them. At any

rate, it was time for bed.

Chapter 2 Episode 36: Taming Magic

The next day...

“Ryoma, are you awake?”

Early in the morning, Eliaria visited my room with Sebas.

“Is something wrong?”

“Mother and Father were going to teach taming magic today, so I was wondering if you’d like to join us.”

I currently knew the spells Taming Contract, Monster Appraisal, and Cancel Contract. Presumably there were more spells than that, and I had time available. But the incident with the hoodlums yesterday was still on my mind. As I thought about that, Sebas approached and whispered into my ear.

“I know this is sudden, but I hear you have room to take time off as of late. Why don’t you take a break and spend some time with Lady Elia? She wants to make as much time for you as possible. We’ll have guards watch your store for the day, so feel free.”

That reminded me that ever since I decided to become independent, I was so focused on my store and securing living expenses that I didn’t spend as much time with Eliaria as I did during our travels. She seemed happy about practicing magic with me, and I’m sure she was glad to have made a friend. I felt a little bad.

“Understood, shall we learn together?”

“Really?!”

Eliaria’s smile was so bright as to be blinding. I felt guilty for some reason. Maybe because I didn’t realize I’d neglected her until I was told. I stopped by my store to tell them my plans, and they all grinned and said I could leave business to them. After what happened yesterday, I was surprised nobody complained. At my old workplace, there would have been outcries. These were great people, and I was glad to have hired them.



I arrived at a wide open area of the now familiar abandoned mine. We were apparently going to train here. Elise came before us holding a birdcage.

“Now let’s begin. First of all, what is taming magic, Elia?”

“It’s used for making contracts with monsters so you can get their help. For the duration of a taming contract, the caster and the monster

are bound by magic energy, making it possible to understand one another.”

“Correct, and today I’m going to teach you a spell that makes use of that bond. It’s called Share Senses. As the name implies, the caster and familiar share their senses with each other to obtain information and know when one another is in danger.”

“This can’t be done with summoning magic, so it’s unique to taming, right?” Elia asked. I didn’t realize that.

“Why doesn’t it work with summoning?”

“Normally, summoning contracts use magic to make a monster submit by force. There’s a bond, but it’s one-sided.”

“I see, I understand now.” I didn’t know much about summoning magic.

“Making the most of Share Senses takes some getting used to,” Reinbach said. “The more you help each other and come to a mutual understanding, the easier it is to use, they say. However, today we will have you two make contracts with these monsters we prepared in advance in order to practice.”

“Why do that? Do slimes not work?” asked Eliaria.

“You can indeed use Share Senses with slimes, but it’s hard to tell whether it’s working or not, so there’s not much sense in using it.”

“Slimes have no eyes, ears, or nose, you see. You can use Share Senses with them, but they have no sense of sight, smell, or hearing, and it’s not even clear if they have a sense of taste. We have no idea how they know what’s happening around them.” Said Elise. That did make it sound hard to tell if the spell was effective.

“I see,” said Eliaria. Then we made contracts with the pigeon-like monsters in the birdcage. They were called crew birds. This was actually my first time making a contract with anything but a slime. When I realized this, I was somewhat nervous, but the contract was made without a hitch.

“Have you made your contracts? Then be conscious of the bonds between you and your familiars, and imagine seeing what they’re seeing. If you can manage that, you can use Share Senses without even casting the spell,” Elise said. I imagined I was a TV with a camera attached at an electronics store in Japan. Images immediately flowed into my brain.

“This is making me feel sort of sick,” I said. Both my own vision and that of my familiar entered my head. It was hard to describe, but it was like being forced to watch two TV screens at once, and understanding everything happening on both of them. It didn’t feel all that pleasant.

“Oh, Ryoma, you did it already?”

“Impressive as always,” Reinbach remarked. “Many people have

trouble imagining the concept, so it's quite difficult to learn."

"Due to the difficulty, it's taught early in life and practiced over a long period of time. That unpleasant sensation is typical with every tamer who succeeds at the spell for the first time. It can be dealt with through practice, so work hard and get used to it. For now, close your eyes and just focus on what your familiar sees."

I did as told and focused on the crew bird's vision. It was on the ground, and its line of sight was very low, but at least I saw through only one pair of eyes. This felt much better.

We practiced for two hours. At the end of it, I commanded my crew bird to fly and kept my eyes shut throughout, successfully seeing a view from the sky. This could be convenient for surveillance purposes. While I was thinking about the possibilities, Eliaria succeeded at the spell as well.

"What's this? It feels strange," she said, evidently going through the same unsettling experience. But while I imagined a concept based on my knowledge from Earth, Eliaria learned the spell in one day based on nothing. That was amazing.

Once we both cast the spell successfully, we took a break. The maids made tea.

"I must say, I'm surprised you both learned the spell so quickly."

"Elia is from the Jamil family, so I expected her to learn fast, but not quite this fast. And I thought Ryoma would have more trouble with it."

"It's great that they learned it without too much trouble. Now it just comes down to practice."

"It's going to keep feeling like this, isn't it?" Eliaria asked. Even with closing her eyes, she seemed to have difficulties getting used to the feeling. It was an all new sensation for her, so it was to be expected. It felt like watching TV to me, so it wasn't too bad, but she seemed to be treating the monster's vision like it was her own. I wanted to teach her how I did it, but she didn't know what a TV was. I could only wish her good luck.

"Ryoma, how does it feel making a contract with a monster that's not a slime?" Elise asked. "Does it feel weird? Does your bond feel weak, perhaps?"

"No, not especially."

"Then you may have good aptitude with bird monsters."

"What do you mean by aptitude?" I inquired.

"You don't know? Tamers and summoners all have different aptitudes," Reinhart answered. "It determines which monsters you're compatible with, how many monsters you can form contracts with, and how powerful of monsters you can form contracts with. It's like how magic elements work. You've probably got good compatibility

with slimes. Otherwise you wouldn't have been able to make contracts with so many."

"Tamers have to learn about their own aptitude and which familiars are best for them," Reinbach said. "Aptitude is vague, so it's something you must discover for yourself. For example, I'm compatible with monsters that have scales. I also can't make contracts with very many monsters, but individually, my familiars are quite powerful."

"I have an aptitude for most four-legged monsters," said Reinhart. "But in exchange, I have absolutely no aptitude for bird monsters. I can't even form contracts with them."

"I..." Elise muttered something, then a big, shining, silver-furred wolf appeared by her side. I was shocked, but everyone else remained seated like nothing had happened. Elise said she was fine and laughed. I relaxed.



"I'm sorry I startled you. This is Luorg, my familiar. He's a little fenrir."

If this was Fenrir as in the creature from Norse legend, then I wasn't sure what to say.

"Oh dear, you're not mistaking a little fenrir for Fenrir, are you?" Elise asked me.

"Are they two different things?"

"Yes, Fenrir is a divine beast while a little fenrir is a type of monster. Little fenrirs are wolf monsters that can use just a bit of ice magic. They are strong though, I won't deny that."

"I see."

The little fenrir was awe-inspiring, and Elise seemed to have it completely tamed. As she petted the wolf, it lay down as if it were a dog.

"He's the boss of a pack of twenty other little fenrirs that are also my familiars. I have about a hundred different wolf familiars of varying types. That's what I'm compatible with."

A whole twenty of these monsters sounded ridiculous. It was nowhere near as many little fenrirs as I had slimes, but there was a massive difference in quality. The sense of terror I felt when it appeared far exceeded that of a black bear.

"Elise's an incredible tamer, actually," Reinhart said. "Most people couldn't get little fenrirs to obey them. When I watched Elise back in the day, I felt so inferior."

"Oh really now? You had your sword, so you didn't seem to care all that much. All you did was practice swordsmanship. Besides, it's not as if you lack talent in taming magic either, I'd say."

"Compared to you and Father, it's hard to stand out as a normal tamer."

"But you never felt especially bad about that, did you?" Reinbach said. "You skipped out on your taming magic training ever since you were young in favor of sword practice. Don't blame us."

I listened to Reinbach's scolding as I watched Luorg out of the corner of my eye. Elise had twenty of these little fenrirs and a total of a hundred wolf monsters as her familiars. Reinbach stood as her equal. This wasn't normal for this world, as I understood it. They were both supposed to be extraordinary.

"Ryoma, what are you thinking about?" Eliaria asked.

"Oh, I was thinking about how amazing it is that Lord Reinbach can compare to Lady Elise," I answered. Happy to hear praise for her family, Eliaria smiled. But Elise stepped in and denied what I said.

"Ryoma, that's not quite true. Reinbach is far greater than myself."

“Is that true?”

“Absolutely, his familiars are on another level. He has less than twenty, but they would all be classified as at least A-Rank by the Adventurer’s Guild, and half of them are dragons.”

“Dragons?!” I exclaimed. I had yet to see any dragons, but I knew ten dragons was crazy. Not only that, but if all his monsters were at least A-Rank, that was a ludicrous amount of power for one person to wield. Reinbach’s abilities sounded even more like cheating than my own.

“What’s this about dragons?” Reinbach asked when he overheard us.

“I asked about your familiars. Having several dragons as your familiars is pretty amazing.”

“I got lucky. Lucky in regards to my aptitude, certainly, but also because the first dragon I made a contract with was uniquely powerful. All the dragons that served that one became my familiars. They’re dependable allies, but I only call upon them on extremely rare occasions. They create quite a ruckus when they show up,” Reinbach explained. I didn’t doubt that. “And I’m nothing compared to the inventor of taming magic, Shiho Jamil, who had an aptitude for all monsters. No matter how powerful the monster or how difficult it was to make a contract with them, Shiho could always do it, they say. The records say that Shiho could possess an unlimited number of familiars, as well.”

The creator of taming magic came from another world and had cheats from the gods, so that probably did the trick. From what I heard from the gods, Shiho was a fine person. I already knew why Shiho was powerful, so I was more curious about Reinbach’s dragons.

“It sounds like Shiho was an amazing person. By the way, what do you have your familiars do most of the time?” I asked.

“They live in some mountains in the area. The monsters there are so powerful and threatening that nobody dares come near them. My familiars prevent monsters from coming down from the mountains and attacking villages.”

“I have Luorg and the rest of my wolves live in some other mountains. There are valuable herbs to be picked there, but a lot of poachers are around, so my wolves stand guard against them,” Elise said.

“I see.”

“When tamers get more powerful monsters, they tend to have trouble finding places for them to live. If you ever make a contract with a powerful monster and need a place for them to live, just ask us,” Reinhart offered.

“Thank you,” I said. When I ran out of space with space magic, I

decided I would do that.

Chapter 2 Episode 37: Forced Break

Once our break was over, I got back to training. Or so I would have, but that was all for the day.

“You both understand how to use Share Senses at this point, so now you just take the time to get used to it. Ryoma, relax and listen to Elia put on a show for you. She plays some excellent music, and I don’t just say that as a parent,” Reinhart said.

“Music? What are you talking about?”

“We talked about the limour bird before, remember?” Eliaria asked.

“Yes, that was why you came to this town, wasn’t it?”

“That’s right. Limour birds fly fast and use wind magic, so catching one alive and unharmed is a huge challenge, and they’re hardly ever spotted. But limour birds are monsters, so you can make contracts with them!”

“I see, but what does that have to do with music?”

“A lot, actually. To make a contract with a limour bird, a musical performance is absolutely essential,” Eliaria claimed. I thought that sounded absurd, but Sebas explained further.

“Limour birds house a great deal of magic energy in their bodies, and they’re highly intelligent. As such, they’re normally resistant to contracts, and they fail as a result. But limour birds use their beautiful cries to communicate and distinguish friend from foe. If you start off with music that the bird takes a liking to, it will be receptive to the idea of a contract.”

I should have expected as much of this alternate dimension. This method of capturing a creature would have been nonsense in my own world.

“You can make contracts that way? I had no idea.”

“The success rate is extremely low, so some question whether this actually works, but I have never heard of a contract with limour birds being made by any other means. It’s the highest chance we have, one could say,” Sebas continued.

“So there you have it. Elia’s going to put on a performance and try to make a contract with a limour bird. She’ll be practicing that this afternoon,” Reinhart said.

“Sit right there and listen, Ryoma,” Eliaria insisted. “You may sleep instead if you like, but you’re not allowed to leave.”

I didn't understand the point of staying if I didn't have to listen. I turned to the others and saw they were grinning and looking at me.

"Have you perhaps figured it out?"

"You've been working constantly, so we thought it would be best to give you a little break."

"You've done everything from slaying monsters, to starting your own store, to hiring employees, to taking jobs from the Adventurer's Guild, and you're even patrolling the mine and making waterproof cloth. I hear you haven't been taking any breaks. You had some ruffians in your store yesterday, and you might end up even busier as you figure out how to prevent that in the future. Before that happens, we wanted to use today's taming magic training as an excuse to get you away from work."

"We have informed your associates, and they all approved of the idea."

"When did you do that?" I asked. I didn't notice this at all.

"We'll be watching very closely, making certain you don't get to work today."

"Being forced to take a break like this may make you feel restless, but you have to relax at some point for the sake of your health. If you keep working as you have been, we'll drag you to our house by force if we must."

"I'm sorry I worried everyone."

"Maybe you don't feel like you're pushing yourself too far, but if a normal person did the amount of work you did, they'd undoubtedly hurt themselves. It's possible you simply don't realize what you're doing to yourself, so you need to be careful."

"So there you have it, you're forced to take a break today. I'll begin my performance now."

Eliaria was being oddly pushy. Or maybe she was always pushy. To say her naivete made her demand a lot of people was probably more accurate. While I was pondering this, Eliaria took a violin from Sebas and began to play. I didn't realize violins existed in this world, but maybe someone brought them over from my own.

Eliaria's performance sounded simply excellent. She played a slow and relaxing song. Once it was over, she asked for my impressions.

"Ryoma, how did you like my performance?"

"It was great, seriously," I said, and I wasn't flattering her. I got a guitar as a gift back in my world and tried to learn how to play it, but I was never that great. I didn't have much musical knowledge, but her performance sounded pleasant.

My simple compliment was enough to please Eliaria. She began to play the violin again. I listened and petted my slimes, along with the surprisingly receptive Luorg, having a tranquil time. Eventually it

came time to feed my slimes, so I had my three newest ones absorb magic energy. I was shocked to find that one of them began to transform.

“It’s happening!”

“What?!” Eliaria exclaimed.

“Ryoma, what’s going on?” Elise asked.

“Did something happen?” Reinbach wondered.

My shout put Eliaria’s performance to a halt and made everyone approach to see what the hubbub was.

“A slime is evolving!”

All eyes turned to the slime I was petting. It jiggled like when the iron slime evolved, then stopped and repeatedly released and absorbed magic energy. It changed to a brown color at the same time. Nobody could look away. When the evolution ended, I used Monster Appraisal.

Earth Slime

Skills: *Earth Magic 2, Earth Resistance 8, Earth Magic Absorption 1, Jump 1, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 1*

The experiment was a success.

“Ryoma, what is it?” Eliaria asked.

“This slime evolved into an earth slime. It can use earth magic now.”

“Oh!” Reinbach exclaimed. “Another rare slime.”

“Ryoma, earth slimes are extremely rare. How did you manage that?” Elise asked. I explained my method. Eliaria and Elise tested it themselves.

“How does this work?”

“This is surprisingly difficult.”

They changed the element of their magic energy and released it, but it became magic spells in the process. That or it turned back into non-elemental energy. Keeping your magic energy in its transformed states seemed to require a high level of skill with magic energy control. I only had to use a bit of focus, but that was because my Magic Control skill had reached Level 4 after playing around so much. I came to the conclusion that Eliaria and Elise couldn’t do it at the moment.

Frustrated about this, Eliaria stopped playing her violin and began to practice controlling her magic instead, but she never succeeded in the end. Ultimately, she proclaimed that she would strive to learn the Magic Control skill later. She never took her eyes off the slimes I evolved. All three of them had now evolved, giving me two earth slimes and one dark slime.

Dark Slime

Skills: *Dark Magic 2, Dark Resistance 8, Dark Magic Absorption 1,*

Jump 1, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 1

The evolution of my slimes was a bit of a surprise, but when my magic energy had just about run out, we settled down again.

“Oh, a horned rabbit.”

As I listened to the music and petted my slimes, I sent out the crew bird and found a pack of horned rabbits with it. Maybe I could give their meat to my employees as thanks. When I told the duke’s family about this and began to head out, Reinhart and Eliaria offered to help, so we easily hunted down tons of them. I killed a few with my bow, while Reinhart, Eliaria, and my sticky slimes went after others. The job was made simple when so many people were involved.

I met up with the rest of the group, returned the crew bird to its cage and canceled my contract with it. Elise said I could take it with me, but I turned down her offer. I could live without being able to see through the crew bird’s eyes, and if I did ever have need of one, I wanted to capture it myself.

“Shall we return home now, then?” Reinbach asked. A lot of time had passed before I knew it. We got on the carriage to return to town before it got dark. We weren’t in a hurry, so the rocking of the carriage was quiet and pleasant. I must have been more tired than I thought, because I ended up dozing off. When we got to the inn, I headed straight to my room and went to bed.

Chapter 2 Episode 38: For Hiring Purposes

The next day...

I woke up refreshed and went to my store before opening time.

“Good morning, everyone.”

“Good morning,” my employees said.

“I appreciate how you looked after the store yesterday. Thanks to you, I was able to take some time off.”

“I see, that’s good to hear.”

“Too much work is bad for you. Remember to practice self-care.”

“Boss, you work too much. When we heard how much work you do, we were shocked.”

“You built this store in about ten days. That’s crazy. Not even Lilyn and I could do that. If you start doing all this work at your age, you’re going to die young.”

“I’ll be careful.”

“Please do.”

“You try to act like an adult, but you’re still a kid, you know.”

“Even adults have to take it easy sometimes.”

My employees were more worried about me than I thought. Thanks to them, I didn’t feel like I had to work that hard, however. I did appreciate their concern regardless, so I thanked them before I headed to the kitchen.

“Chelma, are you here?” I asked.

“Right here, Boss. Need something?”

Chelma was the only one in the kitchen, where she seemed to be making some kind of soup. She walked away from the pot she was stirring and approached me.

“I left town during my break yesterday and hunted some animals that I brought back for you. Cook these up for everyone. I drained the blood and froze them right after they were killed, so they should be in good condition,” I said, taking the meat out of my item box.

“My goodness, thank you. Horned rabbits, I believe? Put them in the fridge. I’ll cook them for lunch.”

“Thank you,” I said, while relocating all the remaining meat to the fridge.

“Oh my, that’s a lot.”

“I found a pack of them and caught them all.”

“Good thing we have a fridge. It’s very convenient.”

“Is it? I suppose so.”

I had to conjure a new cooling barrier every day to keep it effective, so it was pretty annoying to use. If I got better at barrier magic, the effects would last longer, but this was much better than when I had to put up a new barrier once an hour back when I started using them in the forest.

“It very much is convenient. You can’t do anything with food when it goes bad. Vegetables are one thing, but meat rots in no time! When it’s hot out, it doesn’t even last a day. But with a fridge, you can preserve leftover meat for use the next day, waste less food, and save on money. I’ve heard there are magic items that do the same, but they’re expensive and hard to get ahold of.”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, I went hunting for my food in the forest until recently, and when anything went bad, I fed it to my slimes, so it wasn’t a big deal. This is what they manufacture preserved food for.”

“Those slimes are pretty convenient too. They eat animal bones and other waste from my cooking, which is nice.”

After we chatted and I put up a new cooling barrier, I left the kitchen. That’s when Carme approached me to talk about something.

“Hire more employees?” I asked.

“Normally I would say we have plenty already, but in the event that you open some branch stores, you’ll have to train new talent, which will cost valuable time. I would at least suggest you start to train a branch manager now.”

“Good idea, I’d be happy to hire any decent talent. I know education takes a while too. I feel like I could leave that to you in the end, but you’ll need a tamer too, right?”

“Yes, this store absolutely requires cleaner slimes and a tamer. We have to come up with how to hire a tamer who we can trust not to run off with the slimes or do anything shady.”

“The Tamer’s Guild doesn’t seem to have many tamers who specialize in slimes. Although I suppose that in a sense, they’re a monster that anyone can use, from what I’ve heard.”

“All we have to be concerned about is whether they can be trusted, then.”

“By the way, you haven’t had any trouble with those people who interrupted business before, have you?”

“No, those hoodlums only showed up that one time.”

“At any rate, be careful. I’ll ask around the Tamer’s Guild and figure out where to find a good tamer.”

“Thank you.”

With that, I left the store.

“Whoa! Well, if it ain’t Ryoma?” Jeff said when I ran into him on the way to the mine. It was one of the only times I saw him without armor on, and he wasn’t carrying his spear either. He was stuffing his face with a shish kebab as he walked toward me.

“Good morning, Jeff. Are you on break today?”

“Fighting every day gets tiring, so yeah. You got work today?”

“I was on my way to go patrol the abandoned mine.”

“The one where we went hunting?”

“Yes, I’m the manager there now. I have to go check it out periodically to make sure no monsters are dwelling there.”

“You got that for a job too? Adventurer, laundromat, and this? Aren’t you busy?”

“I hired people to run my laundromat for me, so it’s not much of a job. I’m free to take a break from adventuring whenever I want, and I don’t have to take care of the mine every day either. It’ll get difficult when I open more stores later, but I’m not that busy.”

“Good if true, I guess. Oh yeah, you want one of these? My treat,” Jeff said, handing me a bag of kebabs.

“Don’t mind if I do. Mm!” I exclaimed when I took a bite. There was no salt or herbs, but some spicy seasoning. Sugar and spices and the like were expensive, so food stands tended to season with salt only, but this was different.

“This is pretty good,” I said.

“Right? The kebabs they sell there use a tiny bit of spice. Makes them kind of expensive, but they’re great. The city square’s right over there, if you want to go sit down and eat with me.”

I followed Jeff down a side street and arrived at the city square, where we sat at one of the benches around the well. It was sort of like a park.

“But man, you just opened a store and you’re already planning to open more? You were just saying something about that.”

“The Merchant’s Guild and my employees asked me to consider it, but it’s not like I’m going to open more right away. Besides, there would be a lot of issues.”

“What, something bothering you?”

“My next stores would open in other towns, and I’d have to go around to each city to see if there are any tamers to hire. My business requires someone that can manage slimes.”

“That ain’t much of a problem. Just have the Tamer’s Guild hire someone for you.”

“That’s an option, but from what I’ve heard, nobody specializes in slimes. Beginners work with them before they move on to other monsters, for the most part. There’s also the matter of the hoodlums someone hired to come to my store once. Thankfully I had security to

stop them, but now I really feel like I have to prioritize employees with good character,” I said, biting into a kebab. The spice brought out the meaty flavor.

“Then I’ve got an idea for you,” Jeff said as he grabbed his second kebab.



“Really?”

“Yeah! Can’t help you when it comes to business or whatever, but for labor, I’ve got you covered. If you’re not hiring from the Tamer’s Guild, how about finding someone in the slums?”

“The slums?”

“Sure, they’re poor, but it’s not like they can’t do nothing. I’m from the slums myself, but that doesn’t mean I can’t be an adventurer. I know some guys that can use taming magic too. Also, this town’s got more work than most, so even the poor don’t go broke and have to resort to crime too often. Plenty of us are perfectly nice people, and best of all, we’ve got a sense of camaraderie. As long as you don’t go cutting salaries or turning on your employees like the public office, I can’t imagine that folks from the slums would betray you. They want a stable income and a comfy life just like anyone, so if you want to hire someone, you can get that done in no time. Then it’s just a matter of building trust with them.”

This was a new revelation for me. Now that he mentioned it, the guild was just a middleman. I could search for people myself, then hire them through the Tamer’s Guild or Merchant’s Guild when necessary. It wasn’t a bad idea. Even Reinbach hired people from the slums to clean out the tanks. There was no reason not to hire them, at least, and maybe I could locate someone trustworthy.

“Just think about it,” Jeff said. “If you’re serious about hiring someone, I can act as a go-between for you. I’ve still got some sway in the slums.”

“Thank you. I’ll consider it.”

Jeff got up to go somewhere. I thanked him for the kebabs I had just finished eating, then decided once again to head to the mine.



I had gotten accustomed enough to space magic to reach my destination in an instant. Fifty sheets of cloth went fine last time, so I decided to make seventy today. Once that was done, I got to training. My sticky, poison, acid, and scavenger slimes were good, but it didn’t seem like I could expect much from the bloody slime in combat. It was closer to liquid than most, so it had next to no striking power. It had no other means of attack either. Its strength was its fluid movement, making it the fastest of the slimes. It looked like it could flee from threats, thankfully. In any case, I would have to take my time and watch to see what it was capable of.

The metal and iron slimes were tough, but it had only been a few days since I made my contract with them, so I couldn’t control them well yet. I doubted they could form tentacles. If they could do that

and harden the tentacles, that would have had some applications, but alas. I needed to keep an eye on them for a while too.

I confirmed that the earth and dark slimes could use magic. The earth slime knew Rock and Break Rock. It also knew a spell that was like a weak version of Earth Needle. The dark slime knew Darkness, for dimming the surrounding area, and Dark Ball, which fired an orb of darkness. I had hardly used Dark Ball myself, but I knew it was offensive magic that stole the enemy's life force. This slime was no more mobile than the others, but if it improved its magic, maybe it could act as a moving cannon of sorts. It would need experience using offensive magic in real combat, so this could take some time.

For now, I had confirmed that the two earth slimes could use Break Rock and Rock, so I wanted to try teaching them Create Block. When I tried it, they learned the spell after a few attempts. I was surprised they picked it up so quickly, but there were no problems there. As I trained the slimes, we created stone to use as materials. They could likely be used for something in one of these mine shafts.

I tried to have the dark slime use magic more freely, which amounted to practicing Dark Ball. I had little experience with dark magic, so we spent some time learning it together. Watching the slime while I trained was pretty fun. As a bonus, I felt better than usual today, so I kept training even after the cloths dried.



That night, I returned to the inn and visited the room occupied by the duke's family.

"Welcome, Ryoma."

"A pleasure to see you."

"Did something happen?"

"There was something I wanted to discuss."

"Hoh, and what would that be?"

I shared my conversation with Jeff from earlier that day and got a mostly positive response.

"There's nothing wrong with hiring someone from the slums," Reinbach said. "As long as you can trust them, of course."

"It's great that you're hiring for more positions, I'd just suggest doing it through the guild. You don't want to give them more opportunities to take advantage of you down the line."

"That's true, I was going to have them register with either the Tamer's Guild or Merchant's Guild, whichever they're interested in. Would that be fine?"

"That's good. Much like how you're a tamer who's also registered with the Merchant's Guild, they'll still have freedom of choice when it comes to work. They couldn't criticize you for that."

“You may want to speak to both guildmasters about this in advance. Then this should all go smoothly.”

“All right, I’ll visit the guilds tomorrow.”

With that settled, I drank tea and chatted for a while, then returned to my room.

Chapter 2 Episode 39: Laying the Foundation

I popped into the Merchant's Guild in the morning, where I was once again let into the reception room. It happened every time, so I got used to it.

"Good to see you, Ryoma. Looking to hire again?"

"Yes, but I also wanted to discuss something."

"Hm? What?"

I started by talking about the situation.

"I see, I see. Well, I did introduce you to some unique employees on your first day myself. Fine, if you find someone you can trust, bring them on over. It's not a crime or anything, and I'll have the paperwork ready when you are."

"I'll do that, then, thank you."

"No problem, and good luck to you."

The conversation ended smoothly, so I got off the couch to leave.

"Ryoma, hold on a second. I forgot to tell you something, sit back down."

"What is it?" I asked as I lowered myself back onto the couch.

"It's about those hoodlums who came to your store. We looked into them and found that they were hired by someone, but couldn't figure out who their employer was. They could be connected to a dark guild, so be careful."

"Are dark guilds for thieves and assassins or something like that?"

"Right. They don't just have the guys who commit the crimes, but guys who give them the tools to do it, guys who set up communications between these two parties, that kind of thing. They specialize in theft, extortion, and even murder, so watch out."

"Understood. Thank you for the warning."

"It was nothing. Besides, you're about to go give Taylor a visit, right? There's something I'd like you to bring over there," the guildmaster said, then shouted to a staff member outside the room who came inside with a glass bottle. It was filled with a thin green liquid, and powder sat at the bottom. I assumed it was medicine. After the guildmaster confirmed it was the right bottle, the staff member put it away in a wooden box. Judging by the color and thickness of the liquid, and the powder it contained, I could tell it was a health drink. Not only that, but it was highly effective as a dietary

supplement.

“Curious?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said, figuring I shouldn’t pry, but I certainly was curious, so I asked about it.

“That reminds me, you’re the one who tipped off Worgan, aren’t you? If you know what kind of medicine this is, I’m sure I don’t need to tell you, but it’s not for any particular illness, so don’t worry about that. When you get old, you have days where you can’t help but feel fatigued, that’s all,” the guildmaster said as she wrote something up and handed it to me. “Give that letter to the receptionist. They receive these same boxes regularly, so they’ll know what it is. I wrote that you’d give it to Taylor personally, so you can have your discussion with him in the meantime.”

“Thank you for everything.”

“Tell the old man that I said hi,” the guildmaster said, seeing me off as I left the guild.



“So, there you have it. I was wondering if I could hire through the guild, or register employees who I find outside the guild.”

“I see,” Taylor said. With my delivery as an excuse, I got to meet with him. I also brought up what I had discussed at the Merchant’s Guild. The conversation over there went well enough, but for this one, Taylor looked conflicted.

“Hm? Oh, sorry, I’ll make tea.”

“You don’t need to do that. Anyway, is there a problem?”

“Well, I don’t know if I’d say that. Hold on a second, let’s sit down and talk about this,” Taylor said, getting up to take a tea set off a small shelf to the side of the room. There was also a magic item similar to a portable stove which he used to start preparing some tea.

“You make the tea yourself?”

“I’d rather not waste my time getting someone else to do it, and it gives me a nice little break anyway,” Taylor replied and readied the tea as well as the duke’s maids would have, then brought it over.

“Now, like I said, there’s no problem with your idea in itself. You can bring people you trust if you want, and of course you can recruit someone who’s already registered with this guild too. That’s one of our regular services. Besides, I’d love to offer support to your store, but there are some things that make me uneasy.”

“What would that be? And why do you want to support my store?”

“Well, see, if your store hires through the Tamer’s Guild, that gives us another place to do business. If you open up a couple more stores down the line, that means even more employment

opportunities. That's something any guild should welcome. The fact that the monsters you need for your store are slimes is another reason I want to support you. Remember what I said back when you registered?"

"About how there were no jobs I could do?" I asked. Taylor nodded.

"When the Tamer's Guild determines that a tamer and their familiars can accomplish a task, then they're assigned to the job. If they clearly can't complete the job, we can't give it to them. We introduce some other jobs they might be able to handle, but based on what types of monsters you work with, you'll always be better at some things than others. Some folks have trouble finding jobs, don't earn much, or have familiars that are expensive to take care of. They have a rough time getting by, but sadly there are only so many jobs I can give them. I hear they sometimes even try to switch to monsters they're not compatible with, which never ends well. I try to get around this by having as many different sorts of jobs on offer as possible, but there are limits. Slimes, for example, are slow and weak. They're generally considered useless, but every tamer's worked with them at least once."

"Because they all start off by practicing with slimes, right?"

"You got it. I've been doing this job for a long time, and every year I hear of a few cases where slimes are the only monsters someone can form a contract with. If you can't even form contracts with slimes, then you'd have to have no skill with taming magic at all. That's how easy it is, which is one reason they're used for practice. I don't know how much you pay your employees, but if it's a job that could support someone's life with their slimes, it might decrease the number of tamers who live in poverty. That's my idea. After I said I have no work to offer you, I guess this sounds selfish of me."

"No, I wouldn't say that," I said. I understood why guilds wouldn't provide work they thought would be impossible.

"I'm glad you don't think so. Anyway, that's why I'd like for the guild to support your store. The issue is with the upper brass within the guild," Taylor said with a nod and drank a gulp of tea. It contained sugar to make it fairly sweet, yet his face looked bitter. "If it's simply a matter of providing my support, I've got the authority to do that, but to have the whole guild support you, I'd have to report to them. Then they might interfere in some weird ways," he explained. He must have meant the guild's shareholders. Maybe they'd demand something in return for the support. "Some of them could also be stuck in their old ways and refuse to believe slimes are good for anything."

"The same way you have people who managed to pull themselves

out of poverty, there are people who've managed to make a living with the weakest and most easily captured monsters. I'm sure they can look at these examples and understand it to be reality, but in their hearts they can't accept it's true," I speculated. It would be annoying if they got angry with me as a result, but I wasn't going to stop running my store regardless.

"Well, from what I hear, you don't really need the support anyway. I don't know how much that'll help you find employees, though, so I'll go ask a few people I can trust."

"Thank you, please do."

"Hey, I feel sorry that this is the most I can do, if anything. By the way, are you busy for the rest of the day?"

"I was planning to go to the Adventurer's Guild after this. I'm supposed to meet with someone who's introducing me to workers, like we discussed."

"You're in a real hurry, huh? I was hoping we could take the time to chat more."

"After hearing what you had to say, I've changed my mind somewhat. It's true that I have to act cautiously, but if opening more stores will help people out of poverty, that's a good thing. Maybe I should be a little more proactive. Anyway, I've more or less decided on hiring people, so I need to go discuss these matters and consider my options."

"Hm, I'm glad you're considering opening more stores, but I wouldn't worry about it too much. Also, could you at least stay until the tea is gone?"

"Gladly."

The branch manager poured some more tea. We chatted about a variety of subjects until it ran out.

Chapter 2 Episode 40: The New Tamer

The sun had risen to about its highest point.

“There he is!” I exclaimed. I heard that Jeff was supposed to leave soon, but ended up waiting off in a corner of the guild for an hour before I found him. I watched for when it seemed he was done with work, then called out to him.

“Hm? If it isn’t Ryoma? What’s up?”

“I wanted to ask about what we discussed the other day.”

“Oh, that was fast. I thought it might be a bit longer still. Want to go right away, then?”

“Can we?”

“Sure, I was heading to the slums today either way. Besides, my house is in that direction.”

“Then thank you.”

I followed Jeff and helped him shop for food and such along the way. He intended to give it to the denizens of the slums. In Gimul, those who managed to leave the slums tended to help those who remained there in what small ways they could.

“It’s been especially bad lately with how much income has dropped. Look, we’re almost there,” Jeff pointed out. The further we walked, the fewer people we saw, the older the buildings looked, and the more ragged the clothes of the occasional children appeared. They waved and shouted when they saw Jeff, and he responded in kind. They looked serene, like they were pleased to see him. I drew attention too, but I didn’t sense any malice. It didn’t seem like I had to worry about being mugged. Further down the road, we arrived at another old, but sturdy building that was a bit bigger than the rest.

“You here, old man?” Jeff asked and tapped on the door. It opened by itself. I sensed a little magic energy. “Looks like he is. Let’s go inside. C’mon.”

I attended Jeff inside the building, where there was a large and mostly empty room. We passed through another door and found a makeshift desk beyond which a man in his 60’s sat in a large chair.

“You again?” the man sighed and played with his gray hair as he leaned back. “Jeff, I appreciate all your help, but I’m not that old yet.”

“You’re plenty old.”

“I can still stand on my own two legs. That means I’m not old.

Anyway, who's the kid? You want me to look after someone again?"

"I know what he looks like, but he's an outstanding adventurer. This guy makes more than enough to put food on the table. That's not why he's here. He's got an offer that could even help the slums out."

"Oh really?" the man asked and looked at me.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Ryoma Takebayashi."

"No point acting so polite around here. I'm Lible, boss of the Gimul slums. If Jeff's introducing you, I'm sure you're worthy of trust, but let me tell you something just in case. You can't do with this place as you please, all right? If we can stay on good terms, that'd be great," he declared with great force behind his words. I could see why he was the boss.

"Of course. I don't want any needless fighting either," I said. Lible snorted and grinned.

"Not scared, eh? You've got guts."

"You better believe he does," Jeff interjected. "He's got my approval for a reason."

"I see. So what's this offer?"

"I'll talk about that," I said. It was about my store, so it only made sense.

"...And that about sums it up."

"All right, so you had some ruffians causing you trouble, and you don't know where they came from. Now you want to find someone you can trust, and that can include someone from the slums; did I get all that? Sounds good to me, as long as you're paying enough to live on. Hire whoever you want. It'll mean that much more food and resources to go around for us."

The discussion ended surprisingly well. I expected them to charge a fee to find employees for me or something, but maybe Jeff's introduction worked. At any rate, now it came down to gaining the trust of whoever I wanted to hire. Jeff and I left the boss's house and headed off to see the tamer that Jeff knew. On the way there, Jeff called out to two kids and told them to go get somebody.

"Where are those kids going?"

"You'll see later."

When we finally arrived at a building, Jeff violently knocked on the door.

"Hey! Caulkin! I know you're in there! Come out!"

It felt like I was watching a debt collector. Soon enough, the door was thrown open by a skinny, middle-aged man who had the air of a white-collar worker that was laid off.

"Quiet down, Jeff! You don't need to knock so much, I heard you the first time!"

"You haven't come out when I knocked way too many times for

me to believe that!"

"Your fault for visiting when I was in the middle of research!"

"Like hell it's my fault!"

"You've never researched anything in your life, what do you know?! Research is about submerging in the deep sea of your thoughts, trying to inspect the transient bubbles of your ideas before they pop. There's no time to pay attention to anything else!"

"And as a result, you dumped a bunch of money into your useless research, went broke, and ended up here, didn't you?!"

"Ugh, when you put it that way, yes. Enough about that; what do you want?"

"I was gonna ask if you wanted a job. A taming job," Jeff said. The instant he heard that, Caulkin blinked.

"A job for me? As a tamer?"

"Yeah, at the request of Ryoma here." It was only then that Caulkin seemed to notice me.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Ryoma Takebayashi."

"Sorry, that wasn't a great first impression. You're hiring a tamer? For what?"

"Could you just let us inside, Caulkin?" Jeff demanded. Caulkin scratched his head and let us through the door, then closed it behind us. The building had only one room. It was dim, lit only by the glow of a magic stone. Aside from that and a cloth near the wall that I could only assume served as a futon, the room was empty. There weren't even chairs, so we sat on the floor.

"So what do you want me to do? Sadly, I can't say I'm that great of a tamer, so I don't know if I can live up to your expectations. I do think I'm a pretty good researcher, though."

"What kind of research do you do?" I asked.

"I used to work at a lab, and I focus on the last job they ever gave me," he said bitterly. "I research slimes."

"Really?!"

"Yeah, but I couldn't produce any results, so I got the boot. That was over ten years ago now, but I could never forget about that lab, so I've kept up my research. Anyway, why are you looking at me like that?" Caulkin replied self-derisively, but the moment he saw me, he looked confused.

"The lab considered this research unimportant, so it was thrust onto people that the ones in charge wanted to get rid of. That was the case with me. Why are you so excited?"

"I do my own research with slimes."

"What?!"

Caulkin and I stared at each other in silence for a few seconds, then exchanged a firm handshake.

“My comrade!”

“My brethren!”

“What happened in those last few seconds?!”

“Well, something.”

“Outsiders wouldn’t understand the joy of meeting a comrade who engages in the same research.”

“You’re right, I don’t get that at all.”

Then we heard a knock at the door.

“Another guest? Awfully busy today,” Caulkin grumbled and stood up to go open the door. A man and a woman were standing outside.

“Caulkin? We heard we could get work here. Is that true?”

“I never thought we could get some tamer work, so I hurried straight here!”

“What, Lobelia and Tony? You heard about it too? There’s someone here looking for tamers to hire, and he’s a comrade!”

“A comrade?”

“Does that mean what I think it means?”

“Anyway, come inside!” Caulkin said, dragged them into the room, and closed the door. We each introduced ourselves.

The man, Tony, was 23 years old. He was an excellent tamer, but out of jealousy for his talent, his boss and coworkers took advantage of his sincerity. They blamed him for their failed experiments and scandals to get him demoted. He was then ordered to research slimes, and when he was unable to get results, they used that as an excuse to fire him. I asked why he didn’t work as a tamer if he was so skilled, and apparently the people who ran the guild at his old town withheld work from him. The Tamer’s Guilds had already heard through their information network that he wasn’t to be trusted, so he couldn’t find work as a tamer in any city. He was now working as a miner.

“Have you been to the Tamer’s Guild in this town?”

“The ones in other towns were just awful, so no. I couldn’t make enough to feed my familiars and ended up letting them go, so there’d be no use in it now.”

He came to this city to work in the mines. He gave up on the Tamer’s Guild, apparently. Maybe I could get him a meeting with Taylor at some point.

“It happens,” Lobelia said to reassure Tony. She was 25 years old and worked as a researcher, but got sexually harassed by her boss. She was so focused on research at the time that she never learned how to deal with men, and she was so shocked that she sent her familiar after him. It wasn’t a strong monster, so it only served as a threat, but her boss ignored his own scandal and hypocritically demoted her. She was later placed on slime research, then fired. She now worked at a brothel three days a week, where she did assorted chores and menial

work. She also made a living selling mended clothes.

"I see," I said, now the only one left to introduce myself. As we discussed work, I piqued their curiosity.

"There are slimes like that?"

"I've never heard of those before."

"They have unusual abilities, too."

I decided to demonstrate. To keep myself clean, I always kept a single cleaner in my Dimension Home. I took it out and started by having it wash my shoes. They were impressed.

"It's certainly a slime."

"The dirt from those shoes is really gone. Did the slime eat it?"

"But the shoes haven't been deformed at all."

"Hm, it really only consumed the filth?"

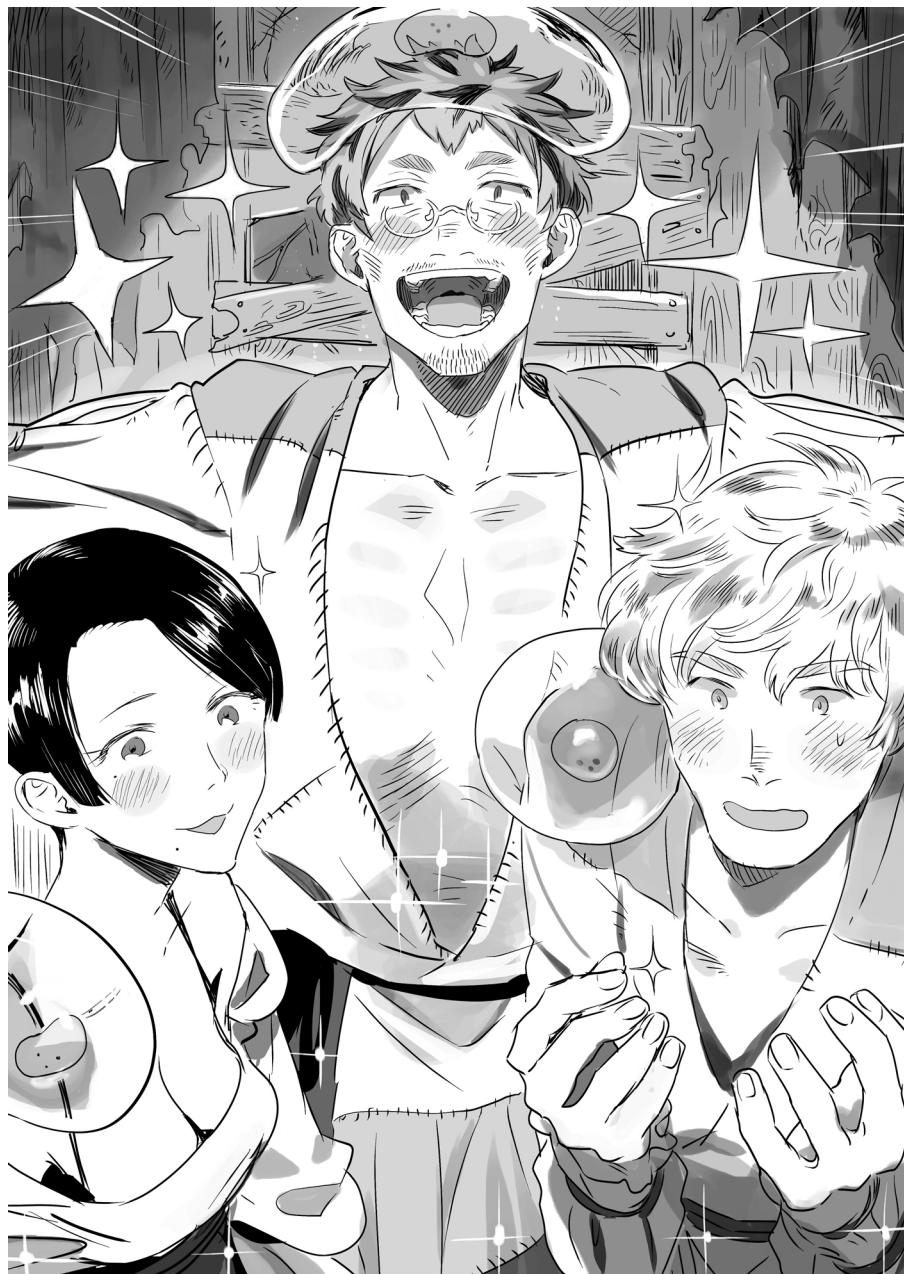
Once I proved it was safe, I let the cleaner slime cleanse my body next. I didn't know whether they were worried or excited, but they watched in silence until it was over.

"As long as I have it out, would any of you like to try it?" I offered. They all expressed interest at the same time, but I only had one on hand, so they had to take turns. It took an oddly long time, but to my surprise, their skin was so thoroughly washed that it was glossier and more vibrant than before.

"I like this more than soap."

"It does feel refreshing, doesn't it?"

"I haven't felt this way in years!"



The grime that they could never fully get rid of living in the slums appeared to be gone. The worse the filth, the more time it took to remove, so it was especially noticeable.

"This is fascinating. Our job would be to run a laundry business with this slime? May we use our free time to do research?"

"With this, we can get back on everyone who looked down on slime researchers!"

"And the pay is much better than what I've gotten in the past. I'll even get to work as a tamer again. I'll do it, so please give me the job!"

Their passion and intensity was a bit overbearing. I was somewhat hesitant to hire them, but I wasn't one to talk when it came to passion in this area, so as long as they would remain faithful, they were fine. Our goals were similar, so it seemed like a good enough idea to hire them. After that, I would just need to have my other employees keep an eye on them to ensure they were trustworthy.

"Would this conflict with your current jobs?"

"Nobody's hiring me right now anyway. My most recent job just finished up, so I didn't know when my next opportunity would arrive."

"I was getting same-day pay in the mines, so I can stop whenever."

"I only have to tell the brothel that I'm done."

"I see. Can you do math?"

"Of course, for the most part," they all said.

"Then by all means work for me. I haven't decided where to open my second store yet, but you'll have to spend some time learning what to do on the job. Where will you live? You can stay here in the slums, or live in my store."

"In the store!" All of them shouted at once.

"Then let's go with that. Now, I'd like to take you straight to my store, but maybe we can do something before that. Jeff, are there any clothing stores around here?" I asked. Not to insult these three, but their clothes were awfully tattered. The cleaner slime washed them up, but they were still full of holes. It was only the high-end stores that had uniforms, while normal stores had their employees work in their own clothes. My store was one of the latter, but I couldn't have my employees looking like this.

I asked Jeff and Lobelia to go to the nearest clothing store to buy a few pairs of clothes. If there were only men, Jeff could have done it himself, but nobody but Lobelia would have known about women's clothes. In the meantime, I had to rush back to my store and tell Carme about the new hires.

Chapter 2 Episode 41: Premonition

I returned from the store and met up with Jeff and Caulkin, who had changed clothes.

“Anyway, I’ve gotta get going.”

“Thanks for everything, Jeff!”

“It was nothing. See ya!”

Jeff had finished his job, so he left as I got back. I bowed and saw him off, then brought the new employees with me to the Merchant’s Guild. I had asked them which guild they wanted to register with, and the decision was unanimous. When we arrived, we were of course let into the reception room to meet with the guildmaster.

“Are these the new guys?”

“Yes, I found them through an acquaintance.”

“You always work quick, eh? You just came to ask me about it this morning. Well, that kind of fast action is admirable in a merchant. So, you folks are going to work at this kid’s store?”

“Yes!” they answered. The guildmaster looked at them, somewhat wide-eyed.

“Oh hoh, Ryoma, what’d you do? They’re oddly ambitious. And yet they seem loyal to you. Hard to believe you only just met them today,” the guildmaster observed, as perceptive as ever. They were all slime researchers for a time, so they recognized the value of cleaner slimes and thought highly of me regardless of my age. Part of it was likely also their pent-up resentment. The chance to make up for past failures overjoyed them, and they also received the security of a stable income. It hadn’t been long since we met, but they seemed to look up to me. Tony in particular had a bad experience with the Tamer’s Guild, so he must have had a lot of anger deep down.

Their reasons aside, the guildmaster saw no problem with forming contracts with all three of them. Their main job would be to manage the cleaner slimes, so they also signed a contract to not give my slimes to anyone. There were many types of contract paper, and the variety we used was normally for significant deals only. These contracts didn’t use magic, but the paper itself served as important proof of the agreement, and they were strictly managed by the guild such that fakes couldn’t be created. Any breaches of these contracts were severely punished. An exception in the contracts was that if I established more stores and gave them permission, they could be the

tamers in charge of those stores. Without that bit, I wouldn't have been able to start new branches. Once the paperwork was taken care of, we thanked the guildmaster and left the guild.



Next, I went to my store to introduce my new employees and put them to work right away.

“Customers 13, 14, and 15, please!”

“Numbers 38, 39, and 40, I'm leaving your clothes right here!”

After a chat on our way to the store, I learned that Caulkin used to be a noble. The way he talked to people could be somewhat haughty, so rather than have him speak to customers, I put him in charge of carrying clothes. Tony had the stamina of a miner, so I gave him that duty as well. Lobelia worked a job with a lot of human interaction, so I placed her at the reception desk. She was quick to adapt to her role. I don't know what it was, but the skills she picked up from her last job seemed to draw the eyes of adventurers. Her clothes weren't especially revealing, but maybe that had nothing to do with it. Attraction is about more than what you can see. At any rate, there was a high chance that these male adventurers would become regular customers.

Now that I thought about it, all the women I hired were beautiful. Although, that could have been because the people of this world tended to be attractive in general. I couldn't think of a single ugly person I had met. Even the elderly aged gracefully. While I was thinking about that, I heard a shout.

“Is that you, Caulkin?! Why are you here?!”

“Is that Leipin that I hear?!”

“You two know each other?”

Caulkin was in the middle of carrying some laundry when Leipin yelled at him from over the counter.

“Oh, yes, I used to work with Leipin.”

“We were employed by the same monster research facility. I quit after a matter of years, however. Never did I expect to run into you in a place like this, Caulkin. When did you come to this city?”

“Well...” Caulkin trailed off. It was going to be a long story.

“Caulkin, you can take a break now. Leipin, you're free to come talk with him in the back,” I said, allowing them to use the break room.



Around an hour later, after Leipin heard all about Caulkin's situation, he let out a deep sigh.

“I cannot believe you have been in this city for longer than I have.

I was certain you must have only just arrived.”

“I didn’t think you were here either. I assumed you’ve been chasing monsters from city to city.”

“Indeed I have been, but this town is my base of operations. But this meeting of ours was quite the coincidence.”

“Agreed, I never thought I’d see you again. I always wished that I listened to you and ditched that lab when you did, but in the end, the choice was made for me.”

“What did I tell you? We may be researchers, but laboratories are no place for us.”

“Unlike you, I’m no good at magic. Nor do I have any talent at taming monsters. I thought that adventuring would be too dangerous for me, so I felt I couldn’t go with you. As far as that goes, I still think I made the right decision, but I should have given up on the lab sooner than I did. Maybe then I wouldn’t have wasted so much money and gone bankrupt.

“But now I’ve been hired here, so maybe life isn’t so bad. This could be my chance to get back at everyone who mocked us. Also, it’s only been a few hours so far, but learning about the cleaner slimes feels like it made all my years of slime research worth something. All thanks to you, Boss.”

“No, thank you for your hard work.”

“I’m only doing my part.”

“Well, I’m glad to see you’re alive,” Leipin said. “This job should provide some security.”

The conversation slowed to a crawl, but then I started to wonder why Leipin came in the first place. He didn’t seem to have any laundry with him, unless it was in his Item Box.

“By the way, Leipin, did you want us to do your laundry?”

“Ah, right! I am not here for laundry today. I got plenty done yesterday,” he answered. He must have come in while I was gone. “Today I have something to tell you about. Do you know of grell frogs?”

“Those monsters that appear in great numbers in a swamp near town? Their hides are used to make armor, and their organs are used in medicine, I hear.”

“I am glad you know, that makes things quick. They have begun to spawn.”

“Really?!”

“They are expected to hit their peak numbers in three or four days, but tomorrow, the guild will put out requests for the capture of grell frogs. They go for a high price thanks to the medicine produced from their parts, and they are also used as bait for limour birds, so they are popular among tamers and nobles. Forming a contract with a

limour bird would prove your worth as a tamer and raise your standing within the guild. Try it, if you are so inclined.”

Putting my standing within the Tamer’s Guild aside, I had heard that limour birds fly fast, so maybe they would be useful for delivering letters.

“Thank you for the info. If I open branches of my store in other towns, it’ll be best to have a quick and reliable means of communication, so I think I’ll try catching some.”

“Is that right? Good luck.”

There was a sudden knock at the door, and I heard what was probably Carme’s voice. He sounded so similar to Carla that it could be hard to tell.

“Boss, Asagi the adventurer is here with a group of five. They want to speak with you,” he said. I didn’t know what they wanted, but I looked at my two guests and they seemed to be understanding.

“Let them in.”

“As you wish.”

Carme left for the moment, and Caulkin said he would get back to work, knowing there would be more chances to see Leipin. Coming in as he left were Asagi, Miya, Welanna, Mizelia, and Cilia.

“Welcome, everyone. What do you need?”

“Sorry about the sudden visit. Meow? You’re here too, Leipin?”

“I was telling Ryoma about the grell frog outbreak.”

“Hrm, you too? We were going to discuss the same topic.”

“If I might ask, Ryoma, where did you buy those work clothes you were wearing before?”

“We can always get laundry done here, but it’s rough having to come by so often, especially for beastkin and dragonewts like us. That’s why we’d like some clothes that don’t get dirty so fast.”

I decided to introduce them to Serge’s store. They already had waterproof cloth in stock, so I assumed he had begun to make clothes from it.

“You can find it at the Morgan Trading Company in town. Those clothes aren’t very well known yet, so there’s not much demand and I don’t know how much they’ll have in stock. It’s possible they only have a few, but you all met the president of the company at least once, at my opening party. He’ll probably accommodate you,” I said. At the very least, I doubted that he would flat out refuse.

“Really?! Thank you!”

“It’s nothing.”

“No, this really helps us out. Beastkin noses are stronger than humans can possibly imagine.”

“Even the slightest stench is hard to ignore.”

“Thank you, I will go straight to the Morgan Trading Company.

Farewell,” Asagi said hurried away.

“What? He doesn’t get like that very often.”

“True, Asagi would normally spend a bit longer apologizing for the sudden intrusion.”

“Ah?!”

“Meow?!”

“What is it, Cilia?”

“Those work clothes! You said there might not be many available, right?!”

“Asagi’s gonna buy them all! We have to hurry!”

“No use sticking around here! I gotta rush! Thanks, Ryoma!”

The rest of them scrambled away as well. If odors were such a problem, I had to wonder just how powerful their sense of smell was.

“What a boisterous bunch.”

“Leipin, what about you? Aren’t you going?”

“I am used to filth and stench. It goes along with monster research. Besides, I use magic to capture grell frogs, so I have no need to enter the swamp. I hardly get dirty.”

“I see.”

We spent some time chatting about monsters. From what he told me, you could sell grell frogs to the guild for a medium silver coin each, thanks to how the medicine made from their organs had numerous effects. According to the medicinal knowledge I received when I came to this world, there were more than fifty drugs made from grell frogs. Many of them worked as aphrodisiacs or nutritional supplements, and male nobles bought them for a high price.

But it was important to process the grell frog organs correctly. If done wrong, the quality could drop precipitously. You would still produce some medicine, but of lesser value, and certain types of drugs would be impossible to make. That’s why the guild only called for their capture, and insisted that adventurers not dissect the frogs themselves.

The most crucial part of the process was draining the blood. It had to be done as carefully as possible. That seemed like a perfect job for my bloody slime. After that, they had to be dried and preserved. This could potentially damage the frogs, so wind magic or similar methods were required to dry them swiftly. The speed at which they were dried had a significant effect on their quality, but maybe alchemy would work. I could easily process the grell frogs, had ample use for them, and could preserve them as well. If I didn’t take the job from the guild, I might not be able to sell them. If I did try to sell them, however, they could be purchased for less than what they would otherwise be worth. As with collecting herbs, it might have been a good idea to go capture these grell frogs without taking a job from the

guild for use as ingredients in medicine. I discussed these matters with Leipin for a surprisingly long time.

“Is it this late already? My apologies for taking up so much of your time.”

“That’s all right, it was fun.”

I saw Leipin off, and not long after that, we closed for the day. I checked on our sales, then decided to go home for the day.

Chapter 2 Episode 42: Preparations

I was with the duke's family in their room, enjoying Araune's tea as I reported to them.

"Did the guild listen?"

"Yes, and I just hired three tamers today."

"Already? Isn't that a little fast?"

"Maybe, but I found some good ones. The guildmaster of the Merchant's Guild agreed."

"Hoh, that's a relief."

"Also, they all have a history with researching slimes, so they seem highly motivated. Apparently because it'll help them get back at somebody, or something."

"I see, so that's why."

"If they have good reason to work with you, maybe that makes them more trustworthy."

After we discussed the store, Reinhart told me about the grell frog outbreak as well. They were planning to make a contract with a limour bird in a couple days.



The next day.

I popped into the store in the morning and told them about tomorrow's plans to make sure I had time available. Caulkin gave me some tips about limour birds.

"Thank you. You certainly know a lot about them."

"Well, I do try to make a contract with one every year," Caulkin laughed. "It's never worked, but I know how to do it, at least."

"What about this year?"

"I was planning to try until yesterday, but now that I'm working here, I don't especially care about limour birds anymore," he said with a smile. He was happy to work for me, thankfully. I left the store in a good mood and headed to Serge's place next.

"Welcome, Master Ryoma."

"Good morning, Serge. I'm here to deliver some waterproof cloth."

"Thank you. The cloth from a couple days ago? I suppose you must have advertised it yesterday as well, because five customers came for those clothes."

"How have they been selling?"

“Those five aside, I sell at least a few every day. Quite a few adventurers already seem to know about them, and some even buy sets for their allies.”

“Come to think of it, back when I was cleaning those tanks, I walked around in those clothes every day. Maybe they drew attention.”

“That’s probably it. The demand may increase quicker than anticipated.”

“I have seventy strips of cloth for you today, but I should still be able to produce more. I’ll expand my work space and try to make as many as possible.”

“Thank you, but don’t push yourself too far,” Serge warned. Even he seemed to think that I worked too much.

“I’ll be fine. The store doesn’t need me anymore, and most of the time I spend on the waterproof cloth involves waiting for them to dry, so I’m not left with much to do.”

“If you say so,” Serge said and eyed me suspiciously, then checked my cloths and paid me the manufacturing fee. I took some unprocessed cloth and headed to the mine.



Just as I arrived at the mine, I asked my sticky slimes to handle the cloths, then took my two earth slimes and my scavengers to another mine shaft to create a new work space. I had the earth slimes use Create Block to dig holes, while the scavengers carried the blocks, leaving me to reinforce the walls. We created more stands to increase our waterproof cloth production rate. As a result, we were able to produce 140 strips of cloth, double our previous record. It looked like the sticky slimes could still go further, but I decided that 150 would be our maximum. I didn’t want them to overdo it.

The slimes did a lot of work that day, so I let them off without any training. I used water magic to fill up a stone bowl I created with earth magic. The slimes gathered around to drink from it, and as I watched them, something occurred to me. Maybe the earth and dark slimes weren’t the only ones that absorbed magic energy.

To test it out, I released some non-elemental energy. The other slimes didn’t absorb it with the same vigor as the elemental ones, but they all seemed to consume some amount. I tried out different elements and found that the sticky slimes preferred their energy non-elemental, poison slimes liked the poison element, and the metal and iron slimes enjoyed the earth element. The earth and dark slime’s preferences should go without saying.

The biggest surprises were the bloody slime that liked non-elemental and water energy, the acid slimes that liked poison and

water, the cleaner slimes that liked water and light, and the scavenger slimes that liked earth and dark. They all enjoyed two elements about equally, so some slimes had multiple preferences. The healing slimes liked non-elemental, water, and light energy, but preferred healing spells most of all. I didn't know why this one slime liked magic spells more than energy, but it was a chance to practice my healing magic, so I couldn't complain.

Soon enough, the healing slimes were ready to multiply. Magic energy must have acted as a form of sustenance for them. I would have to look into that later, but for now, I made a contract with the new slimes. Now I had four healing slimes.

After that, I prepared for the contract with the limour bird by taking a guitar out of my Item Box and practicing with it. I played guitar as a hobby and never got that good. Hopefully it would be enough for the contract to work, but it wasn't worth worrying about. If I failed, I could always find other bird monsters.

I killed time until the cloths dried, then returned to town and went to Serge's store as usual. Now he had enough to fill up on his stock of waterproof cloth for the time being. He said that manufacturing them into clothes would take time, so he didn't need any more deliveries for a while. Maybe he was a bit hesitant to give me even more work. Most of that work was done by the slimes, though. I decided to make all my remaining cloth into waterproof cloth for the future.

I left Serge's store, looked at the sky, and thought for a bit. My work had ended at an awkward time. If I returned to the inn now, there would be nothing for me to do, but there was no time to go back to the mine and train. At times like these, there was no better place to go than the church.



When I got to the church, the woman from when I got my status board created was outside the gate.

"Oh, you're the boy from before."

"Nice to see you again."

"Welcome, what business do you have here today?"

"I came to pray."

"I see, then come this way, please."

Much like last time, I took a seat in the chapel and clasped my hands together in prayer. I expected to go to the world of the gods like I always did, but nothing happened. Maybe I was wrong to think it would happen every time. Or so I thought, but then everything flashed white.

"Well, now I'm here, as usual. Strange that it took longer this

time, though.”

“Sorry about that, I hardly ever gotta use this power. It takes time,” someone answered from behind me. I turned around and saw a short, hairy, middle-aged man carrying a barrel under his right arm, drinking from a wine bottle in his left hand. I could immediately tell this was the God of Wine.

“Are you Tekun, God of Wine?” I asked to make sure.

“Yeah, I’m Tekun. And sure, I’m a god, but don’t feel like you have to kiss up to me. I can read your mind, so not much point in showing your respects verbally. I hate when humans do that, waste of time. Anyway, have a seat.”

I never thought about it before, but maybe the formalities humans used with each other were meaningless to a being that could read minds. I did as Tekun asked and sat in place.

“All right then, I’ll make it simple. Nice to meet you. I’m Ryoma Takebayashi. Thanks for blessing me.”

“I’ve seen you plenty, kid, this isn’t much of a first meeting for me. The blessing was nothing, really. I just gave it to you because you happened to seem interesting,” Tekun said and took a drink from his bottle.

“Are you the only one here today?”

“Yeah, the others are off doing their own thing. The God of War, the God of Magic, the God of Land, they’re all off in what you humans would call their homes. They all look like white voids, but they’re actually pretty comfy.”

“I see, I didn’t know about those. So is this your home?”

“Nah, I don’t got no home. I’m a god of work and wine, and there are all sorts of places where you can partake in those. I just wander between worlds when I feel like it.”

“You can do that?”

“Sure, your world and ours are actually connected. Ask someone else for more details about that, though. Explaining stuff’s not my strong suit. Anyway, have a drink,” Tekun said and pulled a goblet full of wine out of thin air. It was golden, decorated with silver and small jewels.

“Cheers!”

“Ch-Cheers! This is delicious!” I shouted. It was particularly sweet wine.

“A human blessed by the God of Agriculture used soil blessed by the God of Land to produce the fruit and flower honey. Then an artisan blessed by myself made the fruit wine. Of course it’s delicious.”



“Neat. Can I find this somewhere when I get back? And can I get some land blessed too?”

“Glad you like it, but this was an offering to the gods. These get given to us, then what’s left over is shared between the artisans. Doubt you’ll find it easily. As far as getting a blessing, I can only bless people, but the God of Land blesses the soil. There are some other gods who bless the places they like too. You know Gain, and that guy blessed this entire world way back in the day. Seeing as how he’s the Creator and all.

“Well, by now the creatures of this world have grown to do their own thing, so Gain’s blessing isn’t as effective in as many places. Same goes for me, but that’s also because I stopped giving out many blessings. Like, say I like a guy for putting so much work into smithing, so I bless him. Now he’s able to make good stuff, but he starts to slack off because of it, so I take the blessing back,” Tekun said and took a drink from his bottle. “By the way, you know where Gain and the rest of those guys have been going?”

“They’ve been going somewhere?”

“Yeah, I’ve hardly seen hide or hair of them lately. They just up and vanish all the time. Not like there’s much work to do, so it’s not that big a deal, but this never happened before, so I’m curious.”

“I wouldn’t know. I can’t come to this world unless I’m summoned here,” I explained, but then I remembered what Kufo told me last time I was here. “Maybe they’ve been going to the world I first came from.”

“That world? What was it, Earth?”

“Yeah, Earth. Kufo told me that he, Gain, and a couple others were going to Earth to go sightseeing.”

“What?! Sightseeing in another world?! The hell are they up to?!” Tekun cried.

“Is something weird about that?”

“Gods don’t usually interfere in the worlds they’re not in charge of. When we bring folks like you over from other worlds, it’s only because our world is in trouble. We don’t just go sightseeing willy-nilly.”

“But that’s definitely what Kufo said. Gain was getting into idols, Lulutia wanted to try a bunch of sweets, and Kufo wanted to explore unexplored places or something.”

“How could that be? You sure about that? I dunno anything about ‘idols,’ but that doesn’t sound right.”

“Yeah, I’m telling the truth.”

“I mean, it’s not impossible that they went, but that’d typically piss off the gods in that world. It’s never happened before you came to this world. Wait, could it be?!” Tekun suddenly roared and stood

straight up.

“What’s wrong?!”

“Damn them, I know there hasn’t been a whole lot to do, but don’t tell me they were negotiating with other gods to get permission to go sightseeing. They’re not the only ones with time on their hands, but are they really gonna go have fun without me?” Tekun quivered, picked his barrel back up, and shouted. “They won’t get away with this! I’ll find them, I swear it!” When he was about to run off, I called out to stop him.

“Hey! What am I supposed to do?!”

“Oh, sorry, but you should be sent back when enough time passes. Just drink and wait till you can leave. If you pour magic energy into that goblet, it’ll generate an endless supply of wine. Anyway, I gotta rush! See ya!”

“Wait! Wow, you’re fast!”

Tekun ran away faster than the eye could see. The rate at which he ran didn’t seem to match the distance he traveled. He was already out of sight, leaving me behind.

I didn’t know what I could do here by myself, so I decided to drink. It still tasted great, but I wanted something to eat along with it. Unfortunately, there was nothing around me except the wine and the goblet. Tekun said I could make more wine by filling the goblet with magic energy, but that wouldn’t give me food. If I could use magic energy here, though, maybe I could use magic spells too.

I cast Item Box and opened up a black hole in the air. Item Box appeared to work from any location. I checked to see if I had anything to eat, but there was nothing. I had been keeping all my food in the fridge at my store. I pulled out a few random items from the Item Box, but didn’t find anything edible. Eventually a light began to shine, signaling that it was time for me to go back. I guzzled down the rest of the wine in one gulp and put all the items away as quickly as possible. Just as I closed the entrance to the Item Box, the light grew brighter and I returned to the world I came from.

Wondering if I made it in time, I used Item Box and checked on my items. Everything that I had taken out in the world of the gods was placed back inside, thankfully. It was unfortunate that I had to drink all that wine at once, though. I would have liked to take the time to savor it. No alcohol had made me feel that way in a long time. Mildly disappointed, I offered a small donation to the church, then decided to leave.

Chapter 2 Episode 43: To the Swamp

The next day.

Today was the day that I would attempt a contract with a limour bird. The duke's family, Sebas, Jill, Zeph, Camil, Hughes, and I were walking to the abandoned mine. Everyone else was equipped with weapons and armor as they were during training, but I was in overalls, making me stand out. Because this was for Eliaria's training, though, we weren't taking the carriage. She had more stamina than I expected. We took the occasional break, but even so, she didn't complain once.

"Ryoma, are you doing all right?"

"I'm fine."

"You never get tired, do you?" Eliaria said, trying to not to show her exhaustion. We were walking uphill on an unpaved path, so some fatigue was to be expected. She must have thought she was better off not showing weakness. Camil seemed to notice the same thing.

"It's OK, Young Miss. Compared to other girls your age, you can walk quite far," she said to reassure Eliaria.

"That's right, don't compare yourself to Ryoma. This guy's not normal. Most people'd be absolutely bushed by now. Seriously, Ryoma, at least sweat or something."

"I can't just sweat on command."

"Master Ryoma, most people don't have to be commanded to sweat."

"You're walking alongside the Young Miss, so you don't have to go that fast. I would understand if you had the training that we do, but what kind of training have you done, Ryoma?"

"Well, to put it simply, I would train until I reached my limits, and if I fainted or tried to rest, I got beaten so hard that I could've been severely injured. Then I had to choose whether to endure the pain or train some more. When that's your daily life, this is what happens."

"Was your trainer some kind of demon or what?!"

"I can't say for sure that he wasn't."

I was terrified of my dad when I was young. Whenever I saw him, I felt short of breath. While I was reminiscing, the time came for us to move onward.

"We have to get moving before Elia stops sweating completely."

“Just a little bit farther. You can do it.”

We began to walk once more. About thirty minutes from our rest spot, we left the road and proceeded through the forest for another thirty minutes. We began to notice a foul stench, presumably that of the swamp. As we went further, the reddish-brown swamp entered our sight. It was situated right between the forest and the mine. This was still technically within the forest, but the trees were sparser, and the rain carried mud from the mine down to here. The closer we got, the stronger the stench. Eliaria held a hand to her nose.

“This is the swamp. All the rotten leaves and animal corpses create this smell.”

“It’s horrible,” Eliaria complained.

“It certainly is, but if you’re going to travel to other lands, you have to get used to these environments.”

The Jamil family’s territory was maintained by Reinbach, so it was in better shape than most, but I could only pray that other regions weren’t as bad as this swamp.

“Hm, there don’t seem to be any grell frogs or limour birds around yet,” Reinbach said. “There is more than one swamp, so why don’t we check the others?”

We followed Reinbach’s suggestion, and ten minutes later, we found a swamp three times the size of the last one. There were about thirty adventurers and tamers present, along with over two-hundred blue birds.

“Those are limour birds!”

“That’s them?”

“They’re beautiful.”

They looked like big parrots, but what stood out the most about them was their long tails. Their bodies were blue while their heads and tails had green feathers. I could see why they were popular. They looked otherworldly against the reds and browns of the swamp. The birds were absolutely stunning, which made the presence of the adventurers all the more annoying.

“There it goes!”

“Capture it!”

“Ah?!”

“Hurry! Before it gets eaten!”

The adventurers entered the swamp and competed with the limour birds for the grell frogs. The burly men got muddy as they attempted to find the reddish-brown frogs in the similarly colored swamp by using nets or their bare hands. It was tough to watch. Meanwhile, two young men by the edge of the swamp were holding instruments.

“Look, those two are trying to form a contract.”

One of them played what looked like a recorder, but he wasn't very good at it.

"How much does your musical talent have an impact on the contract?"

"I couldn't say. It's the limour birds who make the decision."

"Some have played songs they're confident in and failed, and some have gotten so angry that they destroyed their instruments, only to succeed."

"How does that make sense?"

When the man finished his song, all the limour birds cawed in unison. The sound they made was like that of a human laughing at somebody to shame them. It was aggravating to listen to. I also had the information Caulkin gave me. When limour birds heard a performance they disapproved of, they let out a warning call that was extremely unpleasant. Now I understood what he meant. This must have been a common occurrence, because the adventurers didn't pay it much mind. Instead, they took it as an opportunity to gather up grell frogs.

"I'm sure you could tell from the sound, but he failed. He'll never be able to form a contract like this. He can attempt to do it a few more times, but they'll attack if he tries too much, so it's best to stop after one or two performances," Reinhart explained as the other man began to play his flute. He was even worse than the last man, to the point that the limour birds began to laugh before he finished. It enraged the man so much that he pulled out a dagger, jumped in the swamp, and approached the limour birds.

"Oh dear, that's no good. Stand at the ready," Reinbach commanded.

"Yes, sir!" four guards responded and stepped forward. Even Sebas and Reinhart were on guard. Elise approached me and Eliaria. The limour birds nearest the man with the dagger sensed danger and cried out. A moment later, a shallow gash appeared in the man's shoulder and made him scream. It was caused by wind magic. The rest of the limour birds looked at the man as well, turning his anger into fear and panic. He turned to run, as did everyone around him. Several limour birds cast Wind Cutter and aimed at his back. They all missed, but now the man ran even more desperately.

"Don't be like him. Limour birds are gentle monsters, but they aren't weak. If you try to make them submit by force, of course they're going to fight back," Elise warned us, but I was worried that the man would run toward us. He made it up to the edge of the swamp, but slipped up and came to a stop. Another attack headed toward his leg. Camil and I cast Earth Wall to create a barrier between the man and the limour birds. Dozens of Wind Cutters sliced the wall, but it

managed to block all the spells. That brought the Wind Cutters to a stop, but now there was a loud cry all around, making many of us scream or recoil.

“What is this?!”

“Keep it together, everyone!”

Everyone was in pain. Even Eliaria was trembling and about to topple over, but Elise and Sebas rushed to hold her steady. I looked around and found that even the adventurers in the swamp were suffering and losing their sanity, wailing and falling to their knees. It had a wide area of effect, and I felt some powerful magic energy. I could only assume that this cry was the cause, but I had no idea which bird it was coming from. I searched for the source of the sound and the energy, and seconds later, my eyes stopped on one bird in the flock. Much like my own wind magic, it was manipulating the air to generate the sound. Thanks to that, I was able to find it surprisingly fast.

I cast Silent on the bird. If the sound was the problem, then using wind magic that stopped the vibrations in the air would be a solution. The sound stopped as I had planned, and the anguish on everyone’s faces disappeared. It seemed to be effective, but it was hard to keep up. The bird was resisting, of course. It was using magic similar to my Big Voice spell to amplify the vibrations in the air. I was using an opposing wind spell to stop it, so it became a competition of who had more magic energy and who could control their spells better. If I let up for an instant, the sound could come back. Its control over magic was as good as mine, if not better, so I had to overpower it. I exerted more magic energy than before and cast the spell a second time. After a few seconds of resistance, the limour bird got the sense that it was at a disadvantage and flew away. The other limour birds followed suit. I remained on the lookout for any attacks from the sky, but the flock receded into the distance.

“Are they gone? Is it over?”

“Camil, heal that man! Jill, Zeph, Hughes, drag the unconscious adventurers out of the swamp! Sebas, how is Elia?” Reinhart asked, but Eliaria was the one to answer.

“No problems here.”

“Elia, are you all right? How do you feel?”

“Fine, I was simply scared. I’m calm now.”

“I see, that’s good. Ryoma, thank you. You were the one who did that, weren’t you?”

“It was caused by a limour bird’s cry, right? That’s what it seemed like, so I made it stop, but what was it doing to you anyway?” I asked. Elise and Eliaria gasped.

“Ryoma, it didn’t do anything to you?”

“Not really.”

I thought the sound was annoying, but that was about it. Thanks to that, I was able to look for the source, but I was shocked to see all the suffering around me.

“Nothing? Really?”

“Really,” I answered. Elise cocked her head.

“The bird that Ryoma stopped was likely no mere limour bird,” Reinbach explained. “It was a higher class of monster, a nightmare limour bird, I presume. They can use both wind and dark magic. Their most unique feature is their cry, and the dark-elemental mind attacks that they unleash along with it.”

“Hearing it can inflict fear, confusion, and even hallucinations, causing some to pass out. Like them,” Sebas added and pointed to those lying at the edge of the swamp. They were saved by the unaffected people, but some of them were still unconscious or curled up on the ground in terror.

“Looking at them now, they’re in a pretty awful state.”

“That’s just how powerful this mind attack is. A strong body doesn’t necessarily mean a strong mind, so even veteran adventurers may pass out. Most of these adventurers are novices, so this was a predictable result.”

“You can train yourself to deal with it, but it’s still painful. You just learn to endure it better.”

That reminded me that I had a Mental Pain Resistance skill, so maybe that explained it. When I mentioned that, it cleared up Elise’s confusion. My resistance was so strong that I didn’t seem to feel anything from the attack. I was told that I would likely be unaffected by any mind attacks, but I had never done anything to counter these sorts of spells. It was nice that they didn’t affect me anyway, but I didn’t even realize I was being attacked, so that was something I had to be a bit wary of. While we were chatting, Jill and the others came back. They were finished moving the unconscious and treating the injured.

“What are the damages?”

“Only one person was injured, the man who started all this. He’s already been treated, so he should be capable of returning to town.”

“But what’ll we do now? All that commotion caused the limour birds to fly away.”

“We could look for their nest.”

“That’d be tough, Master Ryoma. Limour birds use wind magic to create gusts while they fly, then ride those gusts. They can fly faster and further than most monsters. It’d be impossible to search everywhere they could be.”

“That’s why anyone who wants a contract with a limour bird

waits for them in this swamp. Dunno if they'll be coming back today, but do you want to wait and see?"

"Yes, considering we came all this way. I at least want to attempt a contract once," Eliaria said, so we decided to wait a while. The adventurers by the edge of the swamp eventually recovered, and even the unconscious ones awakened. But they didn't seem to have the energy to keep hunting, or maybe they wanted to leave because the duke's family was present. Soon enough, we were the only ones left.

We created stone chairs a short distance from the swamp and chatted to pass the time. During our conversation, I heard that nightmare limour birds had powerful mind attacks, but if you attack one to try and stop it, all the limour birds around it will fight back. The standard methods of avoiding that are to either endure the attack, or to run away and come back later. My Silent spell wasn't an attack, as all it did was stop sounds, so maybe that meant it was fine. Caulkin and the duke's family had previously told me that harming limour birds was taboo, and thankfully I listened. They also said that higher classes of limour bird were only sighted about once a decade, making them extremely rare monsters. What it put us through was awful, but I suppose we were lucky to see it.

"What did it look like?"

"I think its colors were somewhat darker and more vivid than the others. Its deep blues and greens made it look luxurious. As far as other unique features..."

We passed the time chatting about random subjects. After a while, the mood suddenly grew solemn.

"Ryoma, we're going to part ways for some time, aren't we?" Eliaria asked. Her family had come to see the limour birds and try to make a contract with one, so now they had done most of what they traveled here to do. They would return home after this, so we had little time left together.

I didn't know what to say in response, but I knew I would be lonelier without them. I could say, 'Yes, that's true,' but that would be a bit detached. I could say, 'Don't leave me!' but that would be kind of disturbing coming from a man over 40. Maybe that didn't matter given how I looked, but my mind wouldn't allow it. I settled on reassuring her that we would meet again someday.

"It's not like this is the last time you'll see him, Elia. Right, Ryoma?" Elise said, while I was still mulling it over.

"Of course."

"You can always exchange letters to keep up with each other," Reinbach suggested.

"Yes, you're right! We will meet again someday! Ryoma, remember to write letters to me! And I'll write some for you!"

“I will, promise.”

“You fool! You’re a man, at least give her a hug!” Hughes said and struck my back, almost making me fall out of my chair.

“Hey, what are you doing?! What are you thinking?! You’re a guard, you’re supposed to be the one who stops the attacks!”

“Eh, it’s just fun to see how he reacts!” Hughes said and gave a thumbs up.

“Can I give her a hug?”

“Well, as friends, sure. Strictly as friends. Yeah,” Reinhart said, somewhat conflicted.

“It would be nothing to get upset over. They’re both ten years old or so,” Reinbach argued.

“See? C’mon, be a man and give it to her. Quit hesitating, you’re embarrassing yourself— Gwah!” Hughes yelled. He was getting annoying, so I gave him a hard whack. When I turned around, my eyes met Eliaria’s. She blushed, not the response I wanted. I looked to Elise for help, but she only seemed interested in watching to see what happened. In fact, she seemed to be enjoying it.

“Hey, the hell are you doing?” Hughes said with a grunt, holding his stomach.

“Oh, I was just being shy,” I answered without thinking about it. Maybe that was the wrong thing to say.

“Like hell you were, that was a serious blow! If I were some average guy, you would’ve knocked me out. Man, you hit my armor, so why does it hurt so bad?”

“Sorry, it’s a force of habit,” I said. It was the sort of strike meant for armored opponents, so the pain was to be expected. At any rate, I was strangely worked up and needed to calm down. There was an awkward silence until we heard what sounded like a loud whistle. The flock of limour birds had returned.

Chapter 2 Episode 44: Attempting a Contract

I looked at the limour birds that flew in, at a loss for words. Against the backdrop of the red mountains of the mine just visible through the trees, the limour birds spread their blue, almost translucent wings and waved their green tails. The way they descended upon the swamp was more beautiful than I could aptly describe. There seemed to be a few more birds than earlier, but it didn't look like they were called as reinforcements so they could retaliate. They started to eat grell frogs as soon as they landed.

They didn't seem dangerous, in any case, but one of the birds stared at me. I watched it out of caution and immediately noticed it was the higher class limour bird from before. It didn't eat the frogs, refusing to take its eyes off me. Maybe it was wary of me after what happened. Behind me, Sebas handed an instrument to Eliaria, who was getting ready to perform.

"Reinhart," I said.

"What?"

"I'm going to get away from here for a bit. I don't know if it's afraid of me now, but that high-class bird keeps looking at me, so it might get in the young miss's way if I stay."

"I don't mind. Contracts are a confrontation between you and the monster. Saying I failed because you're here would simply be an excuse. I would never make such a claim," Eliaria declared in an uncharacteristically cool manner. "Besides, I want you to see me make the contract. Stay right there. It's nice to know you're here for me." She gave me her usual smile. Now that she said all that, leaving was no longer an option.

"All right, do your best."

"Naturally!"

After some words of encouragement, I stepped back. Eliaria took a few deep breaths, then began to perform. She played the same mellow song as before. It began quiet and steadily grew louder. The volume fluctuated like waves in the ocean. Whether loud or quiet, the pristine sound echoed across the swamp. On close inspection, the flock of limour birds appeared to behave differently from when the men were playing before, rocking back and forth along with the music. Then the song reached its end.

Eliaria nervously watched the limour birds, who began to caw in unison, but it didn't sound as derisive as the noise they directed at the men. It was like the sound of a harp or a piano. It sounded like a performance in itself, and it lasted about a minute before one especially bright limour bird and eight others gathered around Eliaria. It was a success.

"My lady, the contract," I reminded her.

"Right!"

Maybe she was so overjoyed that she had forgotten. The tense girl remembered what she was doing and proceeded to finish the job. I watched her make contracts with the birds and they appeared to work. She ended with the most beautiful limour bird, and that was the first time I heard her shout with delight.

"I did it!"

"Well done!"

"You did well."

"Good for you, Elia."

"Congrats."

"Congratulations, young miss."

She formed contracts with nine limour birds in all, when even one was said to be difficult. I never expected her to obtain so many.

"Look at all of them! And they're so pretty," she shouted, surrounded by limour birds and petting them. They must have already taken to her, as some were perched on her shoulders or knees. She tried to open a bag of bird food and accidentally spilled it from the excitement, which I found somewhat sad. I don't know why I was worried about that in the face of this heartfelt scene. It could have been something out of a painting called Beautiful Girl Playing With A Flock Of Birds, but I couldn't help thinking about these things.

In any case, it was my turn to give it a try. I took my guitar out of my Item Box, drawing a sharp look from Eliaria.

"Ryoma, is that an instrument? Are you going to make a contract too?"

"I don't play as well as you do, but I thought I'd follow your example and make an attempt."

"Do the best you can!"

"Good luck, Ryoma."

"I expect good things."

Everyone encouraged me as I prepared. I took a deep breath like Eliaria did. I never properly learned to play guitar, but when my neighbor at an old apartment moved out, they gave me a guitar and a lesson book that they didn't need. I killed time by learning chords from the book and playing until it sounded like something I could listen to. I was nothing compared to Eliaria, but I played the guitar

with everything I had.

My song of choice was something I heard on television back on Earth. I never bought sheet music for the song, but I could sort of play it once I got a feel for it. Maybe it was far from the original song, but that didn't matter much. I didn't think I was that great, but not too terrible either. I just had fun with it.

The limour birds began to sway with the music. Maybe they were into it. Once I finished my song, the limour birds sat in silence for a few seconds, then started with their musical caws. Six of them flew up to me, one of which was the high-class bird from before, to my surprise. I thought it was scared of me.

"Ryoma, the contract!" Eliaria shouted. I was spacing out. I quickly made a contract with one of them at a time, succeeding with all six of the birds. When I told the group that it worked, there was loud applause.

"Congratulations, Ryoma!"

"Nice work, both of you."

"Congratulations, Master Ryoma."

"Good job, Master Ryoma."

"Making a contract with a limour bird is very difficult. The fact that you both managed it with several birds at once is amazing!" Elise said. Everyone looked at our limour birds. My high-class bird and Eliaria's especially beautiful one were flying and hopping around together like friends. That limour bird of hers really was gorgeous. Mine were pretty enough, but that one looked brighter than the rest.

"Young miss, could you call over that bird that's with Master Ryoma's high-class one? You should appraise it," Sebas suggested, apparently curious about something. Eliaria cocked her head, but she was quick to call it and use Monster Appraisal. My bird happened to fly over along with this one, landing on my head. I don't know why it had to pick my head of all places, but it was light enough that it didn't bother me. While I was distracted by that, Eliaria cried out in shock.

"What's wrong?"

"Mine's high-class too!" she exclaimed, but only one high-class limour bird was supposed to show up per decade.



“Really?! It’s a different color from mine, though.”

“Yes, this isn’t a nightmare. It says it’s a phantom limour bird. It uses light magic instead of dark magic.”

“I didn’t know those were a thing,” I said, finding it somewhat fascinating, but everyone else was speechless. Then they got it together and nearly lifted Elia into the air in celebration, praising her to no end. Once they had calmed down, they explained that a phantom limour bird was also high-class, but even rarer than a nightmare. It did look different from the others, but I was stunned to hear that two rare specimens were here at once. Everyone else seemed even more surprised than I was.

After that, we went into the swamp to catch grell frogs as part of Eliaria’s training, but everyone’s attention was turned toward the limour birds. They nearly forgot that we were here for training purposes. The grell frogs were easy enough to capture as long as you didn’t mind the smell of the swamp, so it was simple to obtain an excessive amount. Now that nobody else was present, it was even easier. Had there been as many people as when we first arrived, there would have been competition. When we finished that up, we got out of the slime for the cleaner slimes to clean us, then returned to town. I didn’t know if that was good for training, since getting used to being dirty seemed to be part of the point. Maybe it didn’t matter, as long as Eliaria’s slimes became cleaner slimes. Nobody stopped us, so it must not have made a difference.

Before we headed back, we took a break. Elise and Eliaria were surrounded by our limour birds, while Reinhart looked on enviously from afar. I heard that Reinhart had poor compatibility with bird monsters, and they threatened him if he even tried to get close.

Reinbach ordered the servants to prepare a banquet, and Sebas warped back to town in advance to tell Araune that she should get ready. We wanted to celebrate today’s achievements.



When we got back to the inn, expensive alcohol and extravagant, perfectly seasoned dishes were ready for us. This meant, of course, that it was time for the banquet. Eliaria and I were the stars of the show. We were showered with praise as we ate. Eliaria had her fill early so she could focus on the conversation, but I could never bear to turn down a free meal, so I talked as I overate and overdrank. I never liked to leave leftovers, but I ate and drank more than I had in some time, and it was different in many ways from the meals I had on Earth. I drank around large groups before, but it was never this much fun. I knew the food in my world tasted better than this too, but

today, I liked their food more. The drinks, too.

That reminded me of how Tekun said I never had any enjoyable drinks in my world. This was probably what he meant. In any case, I was in the mood to pray to Tekun. After the banquet concluded, I took a bit of expensive alcohol to offer as a tribute and returned to my room. I remembered that the stone statue I made before was in my store, so I created a new statue to pray to.

“This was my second party since coming to this world, and unlike the ones on Earth, I had a lot of fun with it. I got this from someone else, but here’s some nice wine as an offering.”

That seemed like a good enough prayer to me. I bowed to the statue, then decided to sleep. It felt like I would get some decent rest tonight.

Chapter 2 Episode 45: The Day Before We Part (Part 1)

The next day.

When I visited the duke's family in the morning, their room was full of groaning adults.

"Uhn, Ryoma, I'm sorry, but I need more medicine."

"Me too, please. I'm too old to drink as much as I did."

"I'd like some too, thanks."

Everyone was so overjoyed that they drank a ton last night. Even Araune and Lilian looked a little sick. They only drank a bit to celebrate, but maybe they weren't good with alcohol. Sebas was the only one of the adults who seemed fine. I thought he drank a fair bit, but he looked the same as ever. Eliaria was old enough to drink legally as well, but limited herself to one glass. In any case, I warped to the drug store and the greengrocer as I had before, bought the ingredients for some medicine, returned to the inn, and mixed it together. After they took the medicine, they had a suggestion to make.

"Sorry, Ryoma, but can you look after Elia for the day?"

"We're in no position to do it in this state."

"Please?"

We weren't going to see each other for a while, so maybe they wanted to give us a chance to make some memories together. If so, I couldn't refuse.

"Of course," I answered. They thanked me, then went to the bedroom. Their hangovers seemed brutal.

"Now, what should we do today?" I asked Eliaria.

"You have work, don't you? Aren't you busy?"

"I have other people running the store for me, so I only need to check on them in the morning and at night."

"Then can you show me what you would normally be doing with your day?"

"I guess I could do that."

"Then please do!"

I didn't know how worthwhile it would be, but Eliaria came with me, and Sebas attended us as a guardian. We stopped by the store, then headed to the abandoned mine.

When we arrived at the mine, I began to work on the cloths as I always did. There were certain differences this time; before I began to work, I released the limour birds from my Dimension Home to let them play around freely. I also had Eliaria help. I felt like we should do more than this, but didn't know what.

"What should we do next?" Eliaria asked me before I decided.

"I'm not sure. I commanded the sticky slimes to coat the cloths in their fluid, so now we just wait until they dry. It takes a while, so that gives us some free time. I've taken this opportunity to train or make figures before."

"Is that so? I thought you spent all your time working."

"Ever since I had my employees run the store in my place, I've actually had a lot of time on my hands. Do I look that busy?"

"You work every day from dawn until dusk, clearly."

"Some of that time is spent standing around doing nothing, and I have to find ways to kill time. Sometimes I just make stones to build a house with. Stuff like that is pretty relaxing."

"I see. Does that mean you plan to live here?"

"It would make patrolling easier if I did. It's also a good place to practice magic, since there's nobody around."

"Then when are you going to start building the house? You don't intend to live in this mine, do you?"

"I was either going to build a very simple hut or dig a tunnel somewhere in the mine to stay in. I would live in one or the other for a while as I build the full house."

"Well, if there's nothing better to do, can we chat for a bit?"

"Of course."

We left the work space and went outside to a sunny area, where I used earth magic to create some chairs for us to sit in.

"Aren't you going to start school this year?" I asked.

"Yes, all noble girls attend school in the capital when they reach the age of twelve. It's not mandatory, but unless you have a good reason not to go, you'll be viewed poorly by other nobles."

"I see."

"I don't especially want to go, but that's life."

"Oh, you don't?"

"Father, Mother, and even Grandfather say that there would be no need to go if it weren't customary, and they don't want to make me go."

"Why not?"

"The school in the capital is also open to commoners, and many people enroll there every year. The school treats everyone the same regardless of status, but there are some troublemakers there. They also don't teach anything that you couldn't learn from a tutor, so it's

unlikely that I'll find anything worth learning."

"Then what's the point of going to school?"

"I don't know. My parents say I should make friends there, but they also say I should be careful not to blend in too much. They don't care if I can't do what the school teaches me or if my grades are bad, they only want me to practice what I was taught at home."

I was surprised to hear that her family said all that. I asked Sebas about it.

"For nobles and other families with some degree of affluence, the young miss is correct that they could get special tutors as necessary. If nothing else, it will help from a socialization perspective. That being said, it provides an opportunity to learn a wide variety of knowledge for all regardless of status, to be certain. I don't think you would have any need to go there, however, Master Ryoma."

"That's why my parents never asked if you were interested in going to school," Eliaria pointed out.

"Oh, that's true. Do I not need to?"

"If you did go to school, you'd surely have such excellent grades that you would draw attention from the nobles. In swordsmanship and magic classes, at least."

"It would give you more work to do, for better or worse."

"I see."

"Anyway, that's why I'm not enthusiastic about school. If it weren't customary, I would prefer to train with you."

I never thought school was fun myself, so I couldn't argue with her. Considering she was from a rich and powerful family, I couldn't imagine she would be bullied, but I didn't know for sure, so I asked.

"I've never gone through anything like that, but I've never been close enough with someone to call them a friend either. They're all too afraid of my status and my magic energy to come near me," she said. That reminded me that she mentioned this back when I made a status board. Her status was one thing, but I didn't know her magic energy was something to be feared. I didn't think so, at least. When I asked her out of curiosity, she gave me a slightly sad look.

"A long time ago, I messed something up," she said. She mentioned how she had so much magic energy that she found it hard to control, so maybe that was what caused it. "It happened when I was five, I think, when I was starting to learn the fundamentals of magic. My best elements were fire and ice, so I remember practicing with relatively safe ice magic to freeze a cup of water. But then I froze the table that the cup was on too. It was always like that; I couldn't control my magic that well."

"One day, a slightly older boy came to our house, and his parents wanted us to be friends," she said, her mood different from before. I

listened silently to her story and learned that this boy was the son of nobles that were acquainted with the Jamil family. They were interested in having their son wedded to Eliaria for political reasons. On the day they met, their parents had important matters to discuss and told them to go play with each other, but they had trouble finding something to discuss. Eventually they hit upon the topic of magic.

“He was good at magic and showed me his Fireball spell at our training ground. His spell did seem great, and much more stable than mine, so I told him as much. He seemed to let it get to his head and offered to help teach me, so we trained together, but no matter how much I tried, the results never changed. Soon enough, he got frustrated.”

“I’m sure he just wanted to show off in front of a girl,” I said. It was pretty typical of men, but this was a child, and one around elementary school-age from what it sounded like. She said he was older than her, but he couldn’t have been above middle school-aged. Any tutor that her family hired would have to know what they’re doing, so this kid couldn’t have possibly taught her better than them. She never successfully cast the magic, and the boy got annoyed with her, eventually leading to an incident. Desperate to get it right, Eliaria used too much energy and unleashed a powerful ice spell. She lost control over the magic and caused a burst of energy.

“My magic did the opposite of what I wanted. I ended up freezing the boy. Several parts of his body were encased in ice. He was so surprised that he fell over on the frozen ground and injured himself. What happened next, of course, was a lot of commotion. His life wasn’t in any danger, and our parents warned us to be more careful. Nobody blamed anyone else, and we all made peace. But some days later, rumors about me spread among the nobles, saying I attacked anyone I didn’t like with offensive magic, or that when I’m mad, my magic triggers against my will, things of that sort.”

“I see. That must have been awful.”

“I did fail to follow instructions and mess up my magic, that much is true.”

I felt like I broached a topic I shouldn’t have. I wanted to change the subject, but not in a way that would be too blatant, so I discussed a similar experience from my past.

“You’ve been through something like that, Ryoma?”

“Yes, back when I still lived in my village, at school—Well, it was hardly big enough to be called a school, but I took part in a group where the adults taught the village children some swordsmanship,” I explained as a preface, then told a story based on my gym class in middle school. At my school, we learned kendo as part of gym class. In our very first class, I made a huge mistake.

That day the lesson was mostly about demonstrating what we would learn over the course of the class. We learned preparation exercises, how to put on the armor, and the fundamentals of training. At the end, the teacher asked if anyone with kendo experience wanted to spar as a demonstration. Everyone who knew some kendo was asked to raise their hand, and there turned out to be a few of us, but the first kid that the teacher called up was a bad choice. He was apparently famous in the kendo world at the time for winning a number of tournaments. Even if he didn't make first place, he always ranked highly. Talk of this had even gotten around the classroom and reached our teacher, which was presumably why he picked this boy. He went up like it was only natural, then the teacher asked for volunteers to fight him, but nobody wanted to. It was a match they couldn't win, and they didn't want to fail with everyone watching. Eventually, I was the only one whose hand was still up.

Then we had our match, and to make a long story short, I won easily. He seemed eager to make it a quick fight, so he began with aggressive attacks. I countered by swinging at his arms, and that was enough. Two seconds into his match, he dropped his sword and crouched over.

"I hit his armor, but still shattered his wrist. That was the end of the match, and the end of the class. From then on, none of the students wanted to spar with me. They even spread rumors that I hurt him on purpose."

That was what the boy himself began to claim the next day. He said that I laughed at his pain, but I didn't. If anything, I was dumbfounded. But we were facing each other, so none of our classmates could see our faces. When the truth is vague, it comes down to who you trust.

"He was far more popular than me. But people already avoided me before that for some reason, so it didn't change much for me. You know, talking about this is making me kind of sad."

"Don't let it get you down."

At some point, it ended up being her who was trying to make me feel better. I told that story in absolutely the wrong way.

Chapter 2 Episode 46: The Day Before We Part (Part 2)

“Anyway, that’s more or less why other kids avoid me!” Eliaria said, trying to bring my story to an end. I went along with it.

“I see, so the rumors damaged your reputation.”

“Some people simply take exaggerated stories at face value.”

If their parents acted that way at home, the kids probably picked up that habit without much thought. Children are always watching adults, even when they don’t realize.

“By the way...”

“Yes?”

“Are you all right with me?”

“Why do you ask?”

“After what I said about myself, I was a bit curious,” she explained. She must have been worried that I would treat her differently.

“I wouldn’t worry about that.”

“It’s true that I lost control of my magic and hurt someone, though,” she said, but it wasn’t as if she did that on purpose. It was true that I shattered someone’s wrist too. Over the last few years, I also killed thieves that entered the forest by the dozens, and that was something I did deliberately. Eliaria seemed to regret what she did, and I didn’t see any issue with how she viewed the incident from a moral perspective. I had also seen her magic a few times, and it was nothing I wouldn’t be able to avoid. I could knock Ice Arrows away with my sword, and even if one hit me, it wouldn’t have much effect as long as I defended myself. That being the case, her magic didn’t pose a problem for me. When I told her all this, she giggled.

“Is that right? In that case, Ryoma, don’t forget that you promised to meet me again in three years.”

“I won’t.”

“Then I’ll check on you in three years’ time. If you’re busy obsessing with work to remember, I’ll hit you with some of my new and improved magic to remind you.”

“Well, that’s terrifying, so please don’t. Where did you get this idea from, anyway? It’s not very lady-like.”

“A long time ago, when Father forgot a promise, Mother reminded him in the same way.”

“I, uh, I see.”

“Besides, my magic doesn’t work on you anyway, does it?” she said, and she was right about that, but maybe this was different. While I was thinking about that, she began to laugh as if she had just pulled off a prank.

“I have a great idea, Sebas!”

“Yes, young miss? What is it?” Sebas asked. She whispered into his ear, then he nodded and took a small box out of his Item Box. Eliaria took it and handed it to me.

“Ryoma, I’d like you to have this.”

“What is it?”

“A necklace Mother gave me for my tenth birthday,” she said and opened the box. There was a beautiful necklace with a gold chain and a gold pendant adorned with a ruby about the size of a pinkie finger’s nail. It was simple, but unquestionably valuable.

“Is there magic energy in this ruby?” I asked after I sensed some.

“Ah, you noticed. I knew you would. This is a magic gem.”

“Like what they use in lamps and such?”

“No, those are magic stones, a simple magic item. Do you know about mana stones?”

“I believe they’re found in places dense with magic energy, where they absorb a lot of it, if I’m thinking of the right thing.”

“Correct. The energy contained within is usually drawn out when using magic, or used to assist with controlling spells. But not all mana stones are simple rocks; some are valuable gemstones. These are called magic gems. And if it’s ore, you call it magic ore.” Mana stones were used to assist with spellcasting, while magic ore was made into magic items or weapons.

“Now, when it comes to magic gems, you can use them for anything. They help with spellcasting, improve the performance of magic items, and of course, serve as jewelry. Not only are they extremely useful, but they’re supposed to be more effective than ordinary mana stones, but they’re quite rare,” Eliaria said in one breath.

“So this isn’t something that’s easy to come by?”

“That’s right.”

“Well, I can’t accept this, then.”

“But I want you to!”

“Look, it’s too valuable to just give away.”

I stubbornly objected, but Eliaria was equally stubborn. Sebas got between us.

“Calm down, both of you. Master Ryoma, she said she wants you to take it, but that does not mean she’s giving it away. She wants you to hold onto it until she sees you again.”

“Why?”

“I suppose you don’t know about this, but they say that when friends are separated, as long as you lend a precious belonging to them and wish to be reunited one day, there is a high probability that your wish will come true. I don’t know when this idea took hold in the public consciousness and who it was that popularized it, but it has been around for ages, and people believe it to this day.”

“So that’s why you want me to have that necklace?”

“That’s right,” Eliaria declared.

“But isn’t it precious to you? Are you sure?”

“If I weren’t, I would never have brought it up. I trust you, so give it back in three years, please.”

It was hard to say no now. Especially if this was customary. It meant she sincerely wished to see me again.

“All right, I’ll take it.”

“Really?!”

“But I’m going to give it back to you one day.”

“Naturally.”

I accepted the box and placed it in my Item Box. As long as I left it there, I didn’t have to worry about losing it. If I wanted to follow this custom, though, I had to give Eliaria something too, but I didn’t know what was precious to me. Money or animal fur would be unwieldy to store, and I didn’t value it that much. I had stones, ingots, and waterproof cloth too, but none of that fit the bill. After living a life of hunting and self-sufficiency, I began to view everything of value in terms of the component parts required to create it. None of these materials could be considered precious. In the end, I called up my Dimension Home, took out a healing slime and a scavenger slime, and held them up to Eliaria.

“Ryoma, what are these slimes?”

“I was trying to think of something precious to give you, but I don’t have much that’d work. My slimes are at least something I value, and I think they’ll be useful to you, so you should take them.”

Eliaria was confused for a moment, then she held her mouth to stifle a laugh. I guess it was a strange choice. I only picked slimes because there was nothing better, and I did have to question whether they were appropriate as a gift. Maybe I could have thought about it a bit longer.

“I’m sorry, Ryoma, this is just so typical of you. I’m happy to take them.”

“Really? Thank you.”

“No, thank you for lending me your precious familiars.”

I placed the slimes on the ground and canceled their contracts. Then I watched as Eliaria formed contracts with them.

“The contracts are a success. I’ll take good care of them.”

“Please do.”

We discussed slimes and magic, then trained together.

“This is an ice spell I use a lot.”

“I can use Ice Cube too, but I can’t use Cooler yet.”

Ice Cube was a spell for making ice cubes to put in drinks, while Cooler mixed ice and wind elements to produce a cool breeze. Both were valuable in the summer.

“Mist Wash.”

“Oh, it worked.”

I discussed water magic with Sebas as well. I taught him how to use Mist Wash, and of course, he picked it up after only a few attempts.

“Interesting. This uses quite a bit of magic energy, but it may be helpful for washing stains out,” he said. He could likely use a more complicated spell too, so I taught him to use Water Cutter, the spell I actually devised Mist Wash for. But all I said was that it involves condensing water and launching it, then demonstrated on a nearby rock. He watched it with fascination.

“Like this?” he asked and cast the spell. “Perhaps that didn’t use enough energy.” He tried it five times. His first time was already much better than when I first started practicing, but on the fourth attempt his spell was more powerful than mine, and on the fifth, the rock I used for the demonstration was split in half. If someone more experienced in water magic used this, I wondered just how strong it would be.



When the sun set, we used space magic to return to town. On the way from the gate to the inn, I checked on the store and found that it was packed with adventurers that went to the swamp, along with doctors holding bags that reeked. It was good to see that we were busy.

“Welcome back, Ryoma.”

“Thanks for looking after Elia today.”

“No problem, I enjoyed it.”

“Ryoma taught me a lot of magic. I can’t use it that well yet, but I’ll keep trying!”

“Good for you, Elia.”

“Also, he lent me a healing slime and a scavenger slime!”

“Oh, did he? Take good care of them.”

“Of course.”

Back at the inn, everyone had already recovered. We talked all about what we did that day. It was our last day together, so we

chatted long into the night.



The next morning, it was time to say goodbye. At the carriage station behind the inn, the duke's family and their guards had already boarded the carriages. They yelled to me from the windows.

"Stay healthy."

"Don't work too hard."

"Remember to rest when necessary."

"If anything happens, contact us right away."

"If you've ever got the time, come stop by for a visit."

"Good luck out there, Master Ryoma."

"Take care."

"Hang in there."

"I pray that you find continued success."

Even the servants had words for me.

"I wish all of you the best, too. Thank you for everything," I said and bowed. I never knew what to say at times like these. I wished that I could express my feelings better.

"Ryoma."

"Yes, my lady?"

"That."

"What?"

"When you gave me your slimes yesterday, I was wondering, can we consider each other friends?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then call me Elia. All the people I'm close with call me that, and it's not as if you serve my family. It seems odd for a friend to call me their lady."

"Oh, I see. That makes sense. I can call you Elia, as long as that's fine with you."

"Yes! Ryoma, I'll get much better at magic by the next time I see you, all right?!"

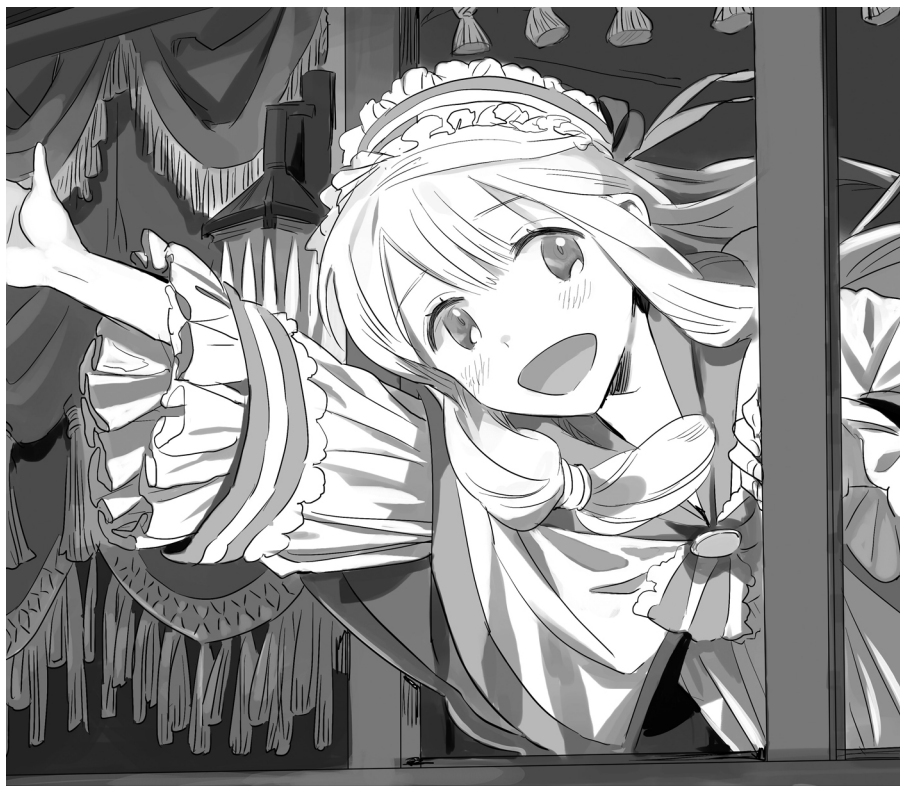
"So will I."

Finally, we wished each other good luck and laughed. It was time for the carriages to depart, so the guards' carriage moved out first. Elia and her family waved to me from the windows. I waved back as I watched them go. The carriages shrank away in the distance until they were out of sight.

I stopped by my store, then headed to the mine. Starting today, the mine was my home. Elia said she would do the best she could, so I wanted to do the same.

I needed to secure a new home for myself. There was no time to waste, so I got walking. Things were going to be a bit different now,

and it was time to get my new life started.



Chapter 2 Episode 47: In the Realm of the Gods

Side Story

Somewhere in the realm of the gods, a thin man was approached by three other gods.

“Ugh, I’m tired.”

“You’re finally back?”

“What, Fernobelias? You came?”

“We don’t see you come out of your territory too often.”

The thin man was Fernobelias, God of Magic. The other three were gods who brought Ryoma out of his world, Gain, Kufo, and Lulutia.

“I was taken here by force, but there is something I’m curious about.”

“By force?” the other three asked. Their answer came when four more gods appeared from nowhere and surrounded them.

“Uh, hey, what’s the big idea?”

“Why are we being surrounded?”

“Could you explain yourselves, perhaps?”

One of the gods took a step forward. It was Tekun.

“How ’bout you ask yourself? Don’t tell me you don’t know.”

“What are you so mad about?!”

“Come now, Tekun, take it easy. This is no way to have a conversation.”

“Yep, chill out and have a drink or something.”

The two gods who held Tekun back were Wilieris, the Goddess of Land and Bountiful Harvests, and Grimp, the God of Agriculture and Livestock. They were among the most gentle of the gods, with the former taking the appearance of a graceful middle-aged woman, and the latter looking like a middle-aged man with a hoe. These two were also married. Grimp drank with Tekun to calm him down while Wilieris explained the situation. They tried to come to an understanding.

“We’re doing this because we heard that you’re heading off to play around in another world. Tekun was the first to hear about it, and he was upset that he didn’t get to have any fun, so he got us together,” Wilieris said.

“Tekun made me use my power to find you three,” Fernobelias

added. "He called Wilieris and Grimp just so they could gang up on me."

"Speaking of which, didn't you go as far as using your divine power to keep Tekun out of your territory?"

"He's good at making things, but he's a loud, annoying drunkard otherwise. He's a nuisance."

"Hey, I heard that!"

"You seldom have any business with me anyway. Besides, you're not the only one that I keep out of my territory. Putting that aside, we aren't supposed to interfere in other worlds. What are you thinking?"

"Hold on, who told you this?" Lulutia asked.

"Don't play dumb," Tekun spat. "Ryoma told me that he heard about it from Kufo. Read his mind too, bad as I feel about that, and he wasn't lying."

"Oops, I told him not to tell other humans, but never said not to tell a god," Kufo muttered. Chairs materialized from nowhere so they could sit down to talk.

"Now, could you tell me what's going on? Or, y'know, just let me come with!"

"Whether it's for pleasure or not, you can't travel to other worlds too often and expect us to ignore it."

"Tell us about it, c'mon."

"Mhm, so you see, we wanted to check on the Earth god."

"I think we told you before about how the Earth god was interfering with Ryoma's life for some reason."

"You did. I was shocked to hear this god was doing such ungodly deeds."

"Yeah, so we were just going there to look for them sometimes."

"You weren't just screwing around?"

"We haven't told Ryoma anything about the god of his world, so we're trying to avoid that subject."

That was enough to quell Tekun's anger.

"Huh, so that's it?"

"Tekun, were you just mad that they were having fun without you?"

"Frequently visiting another world is still a pretty big problem."

Fernobelia and Wilieris were appalled by Tekun's response, but Fernobelia pulled himself together quickly.

"Won't this cause some issues?" he asked. The other gods grimaced.

"It shouldn't, but..."

"We've been sneaking in there, and it's been rough."

"We haven't found anything that notable, but something's strange. There have been a number of other people with misfortune

deliberately thrust upon them, although nothing quite on Ryoma's level. But the happiness stolen from them doesn't seem to have been used for anything."

"At first, we thought that the stolen happiness was given to the god's followers or something, but when we looked into it, that didn't appear to be true. They kept everything they stole for themselves."

"That world has also been poorly managed. The people there have such advanced technology that maybe there's little left for gods to do, but keeping other gods from interfering in your world is one of the basic rules. We were always careful about sneaking in, but it's been almost disappointingly easy to do. I worried about that for nothing."

"We feared that it may be some sort of trap, but in the end, nothing happened. Were a devil to attack them from another world, they would likely respond too late."

"They're being that careless? That makes it sound like they've abandoned their divine duties."

"Perhaps they have."

"What's the point of stealing people's happiness, anyway? Not like we gods have any use for it."

"I'm not sure."

"If the humans no longer believe in you, it's possible to use their happiness to sustain your power instead. But if their world is safe, they should at least have the minimum power required of them. What of that?"

"We were thinking the same thing. The Japanese do have particularly little faith, but there are other countries that are quite devout. Their lack of faith has yet to be a problem for the world. Environmental destruction is causing ever more damage to nature, but not to such an extent that their divine power would be impacted. That's why they have magic energy available to send to this world."

"Indeed, that was a foolish question. But in that case, they really have no use for human happiness. What possible purpose could it serve?"

Nobody had an answer, so the one god who had yet to speak so far decided to say something.

"Does it matter? We would never steal our people's happiness, so we wouldn't know, but maybe there's actually some use for it. Isn't that a good enough explanation? We'll crush them if they pick a fight with us. Other than that, who cares?"

"Kiriluel, you take such a simple view of every problem. Do you ever use your head?"

Kiriluel was the Goddess of War. Her armor hid her fit body, and she rested her hand on a sword hanging from the side of her hip. She was tough and muscular, but many parts of her were also soft and

feminine. She tended to sound rough and masculine, but she was a full-fledged goddess.

“What’s that supposed to mean?! I use my head plenty!”

“Maybe for military tactics. That’s only one thing.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m not using my head! At least I’m not isolating myself in my own territory like you do. That’s not healthy.”

“We have perfect health by nature. I don’t think that’s much of a concern.”

Kiriluel and Fernobelias personalities and lifestyles were polar opposites, so they always argued like this when they met. The other gods were used to it.

“Let’s put that aside for now,” Gain interrupted before it devolved into a shouting match. “Why are you here? Tekun didn’t call you, did he?”

“What are you talking about, old man? I’m the Goddess of War. Arguments are like tiny wars, and where there’s war, there’s me! I sensed Tekun’s anger and asked him what was up, and he told me you guys were screwing around in another world. I was thinking you three could use a punishment.”

“That won’t be necessary!”

“That’s not funny!”

“You’re a god too. That’s dangerous!”

“Don’t worry, I’m not gonna do anything this time. I know something weird’s going on with Earth’s god, and I hear that something’s up with this Ryoma kid’s soul because of that. If we get more visitors from that world in the future, something could be wrong with their souls too, so I can see why we’d want to be cautious. But they’d have to invade our world before I’m getting involved.”

Kiriluel was the best fighter of all the gods. She protected their world from all who would bring harm to it, and enacted judgment against their enemies. In the rare situations where humans did something that could bring severe harm to the world and the gods had to stop it, she was the one for the job. There happened to be four gods judging the crimes of three gods in this scenario, but she could have handily taken on Gain, Kufo, and Lulutia by herself. If she used her full power, she could even have destroyed the three of them, albeit not easily. She had no reason to go that far, of course, but the three gods could imagine the pain Kiriluel might put them through, so they were relieved to hear her response.

“I thought I might have a heart attack.”

“That cut some years off my life.”

“You shouldn’t threaten an old man like that.”

“Gods don’t have to worry about hearts or lifespans. Well, looks like I’m not needed here, so I’ll be going. There are fights going on as

we speak, so I'm relatively busy."

"Sure, sorry about that."

"It's not like you asked me to come, Tekun. I came because I felt like it. Gain, Kufo, Lulutia, keep your visits to Earth to a minimum."

"Yes, of course."

"You're right, we should."

"We'll take turns going from now on."

"You're not going to stop outright?"

"I still haven't—" Lulutia started, only for Tekun to interrupt.

"Still haven't what?"

"Nothing, really."

"We've yet to figure out what's happening there, you see."

"Yeah, that."

Gain, Lulutia, and Kufo tried to act unconcerned.

"You're still hiding something, aren't you?" Wilieris asked.

"You're not lying about looking into their god, are you?" Tekun followed her up, sounding prickly once again.

"No way."

"Of course not."

"We were investigating over there."

"You apparently found out that someone is stealing happiness, so sure, I believe it. But is that all you're doing there?" Tekun continued. The three gods grimaced and looked away. "Well? Kufo, from what I heard from Ryoma, you said you were going sightseeing on Earth."

"Yes, well, we were searching for people who had their happiness stolen. You end up seeing a lot of the local scenery in the process. I called that sightseeing to avoid being specific with Ryoma."

"In other words, if you wanted to go sightseeing, you could do that?" Fernobelilia muttered.

"Hey, that's a leading question!" Kufo shouted as he trembled.

"Kufo, you make it sound like you were going out of your way to sightsee during your search," Grimp pointed out, further fanning the flames of Tekun's rage.

"Gain, I heard you got into 'idols' or whatever, what about that?"

"Idols are entertainers on Earth who sing and dance. They have these boxes on Earth called 'televisions' that display images, and those often show idols. I saw them a fair bit on the streets of Earth, but by no means did I ever seek them out."

"Singing and dancing, eh? We've got that in our world, so who cares?"

Tekun eased up when he heard about the singing and dancing, but now Gain narrowed his eyes and retaliated.

"It's nothing like in our world! Earth's idols are adorable, and they try so hard! You can't help but root for them!"

“Uh, what?!” Tekun cried, intimidated by Gain’s sudden fury. Wilieris took a look at Gain’s face, and he seemed to know that he made a mistake.

“You take these idols very seriously,” Wilieris said. “You just made that quite clear.”

Now Tekun took a look at Lulutia, who decided to tell the truth before he could ask.

“I was stressed out on Earth, so I ate just a little of their sweets during our breaks.”

After that, Tekun’s shouts and Gain, Kufo, and Lulutia’s cries were heard across the realm of the gods.

Extra Story: The Ones Left Behind

(Part 1)

~Tabuchi's Side~

The day after the chief's corpse was found, a somber air fell over the workplace. When I returned to the office yesterday, this department, in particular, was in such chaos that I didn't even have time to feel the anguish.



"Tabuchi! What is the meaning of this?!"

As soon as I stepped into the room, my boss found me and shouted, his face red with rage, and thrust his phone in front of my face. He was so close that I could smell the stench of cigarette smoke that lingered on his body. I took the phone and checked the screen. It was opened to a popular social media site, which displayed the following comment: 'Saw these extremely obnoxious passengers on the XXXXXXXX Line.' It included a video of Iguchi and me on our way to the chief's place. The video was most likely edited, starting when Iguchi yelled and ending when everyone glared at us. There were many responses to the comment, most of which were criticizing Iguchi.

One comment asked, 'Is this the same guy?' and linked to a video of Iguchi being led out of the chief's apartment by two cops and shoved into a police car. The moment I saw it, I realized that the police car was parked outside, and would have been seen by passers-by. To make matters worse, Iguchi struggled against the cops, giving whoever took the video a perfect shot of his clothes and face. It came to light that this was the same person, and this information spread far and wide.

'Who's this guy? The killer?'

'He just found the body, he didn't kill anyone, apparently.'

'Seems like he thought they were just sleeping and beat up the corpse.'

'He was screaming the whole time the cops dragged him out, so I think you can guess what actually happened.'

'And when the cops questioned him later, he flipped out. Just like

you see in the video, he went mental, insisting he wasn't the killer.'

'The police were just trying to get the story straight, too. He must've seemed real suspicious.'

'If he's not really the murderer, they would've found out the moment they determined the time of death. This asshole went out of his way to get arrested.'

'Either way, if he acknowledged hitting the guy's body, wouldn't that be some sort of crime? Won't he be questioned for that?'

'I know this guy. He was a haughty thug that lived in my area up till a couple years ago. His name's Iguchi Genji.'

'Is he famous?'

'Infamous, really. He was always walking around with a group of lackeys and hanging around in arcades, just a real jackass. When he won at fighting games, he'd kick the loser in the game, and when he lost, he'd strangle his opponent in real life.'

'So he kicks corpses in games and in real life, then?'

'Is he good in a fight?'

'Not especially, from what I know. Maybe he could beat someone who hasn't been in many fights, but that's about it. He always kept lackeys around to gang up on people. But he never got involved with any real tough guys, the coward.'

'Wow, what a loser.'

'How does a chickenshit like that get away with acting like he owns the place? Was everyone else in the area just an even bigger chickenshit than him?'

'He's got a rich family of landlords who also run a business, so trying to stand up to him could get ugly. His lackeys were just after his money. They famously complained about him all the time in secret, but Iguchi had no idea. He was so convinced he was strong that he let it get to his head.'

'His hometown, family, and even the school he went to have been found out now.'

Judging by the timeline on this comment, it didn't even take thirty minutes for the internet to identify Iguchi. After I gave it a read, my boss took the phone back.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "I took you along to make sure this wouldn't happen! I just got off the phone with his father, and he was pissed! Do you have any idea how much shit I'm in right now?! Huh?!"

I understood where he was coming from, but complaining to me about it wouldn't do him any favors. Maybe I could have done something on the train, but not so much after we were split up. But that retort wouldn't get me anywhere. I had no interest in listening.

"What are you trying to do?!"

“Boss! Phone for you!”

“Give it here. Hello? Director?! Oh, yes, yes, they’ve already connected him to this company. We’re getting a lot of questions. Come to the president’s office? Yes, understood! Tabuchi is here too, actually, and he was with Iguchi when it all happened! You don’t need him? Yes, all right, I’ll be right there. Goodbye.” He feebly hung up the phone and turned to face me. “Tabuchi, get back to work. Now that Takebayashi’s dead, all his work is now yours, got it?!” After exerting the last of his energy to shout at me, he left with a pitiful look on his face. That was the last time I saw him that day.



When I got to work the following morning, my boss was still absent. I hadn’t heard from him since he went to apologize to Iguchi’s parents.

“Hello, this is Tabuchi,” I said, answering the phone.
“Matsumura?”

“Oh, Tabuchi? I finally got through to somebody! I tried calling other people but couldn’t get ahold of them. What’s going on?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. So, what do you need? It sounds like you’re outside.”

“Oh yeah, I took the day off. Apparently Iguchi caused a disaster for the company. Dad told me not to go today... basically said I should take a vacation for a while to stay out of trouble. So yeah, I won’t be coming into work for the time being. Go tell the manager or whoever’s in charge that I’m just following my dad’s orders, all right? Bye,” she said, then hung up before I could reply.

“Tabuchi, was that Matsumura? Doesn’t look like she’s here today; what happened?”

“She’s taking the day off. Sounds like she might not come back to work for a while. Her parents told her about what happened with Iguchi, apparently.”

“Matsumura too, huh?”

“It’s already noon. She could’ve called sooner.”

“She said she tried to call other people and couldn’t reach them.”

“Sounds like a lie to me. Pushes the blame off herself. She’s an adult anyway, why does it matter what her dad says?”

“At least she bothered to call in at all. Just about everyone else ditched without saying a word.”

Our department had more employees than most, with thirty-two in all, but today there were only ten people in the room. Four of us, including the boss, were doing work away from the office. Three of us were entrusted with separate work elsewhere in the office, so seventeen employees in total were accounted for. That left fifteen

employees who were absent with no excuse.

“Well, it’s quieter without them, so we can get more work done,” I said to nobody in particular. That was the general consensus in the room. “All right, I need to go work outside the office.”

“Tabuchi, did you have plans to do that today?”

“I didn’t, but the chief did, and I inherited all that work.”

A solemn air permeated the room. Everybody present cared about what happened to the chief to some extent. They may have even been trying to forget about it by immersing themselves in work.

“Well, I’ll be going.”

“See you later,” my coworkers said. Their unpleasant stares made me want to flee from the office.



By the time I finished greeting all the chief’s clients, the sun had set. I was exhausted from walking from place to place, but talking to them was even worse.

“I’m sorry, but let’s pretend this conversation never happened.”

“Your company hires some unscrupulous employees, doesn’t it?”

“I’m in the middle of something. Could you please leave?”

“Takebayashi passed away? That’s sad to hear.”

“He looked like a yakuza, but he was a good man who took his work seriously. It’s unfortunate.”

“He even tried to make deadlines that I knew were unreasonable when I asked for them.”

The incident with Iguchi had a negative impact on the company’s image, and we lost a number of jobs because of it. Hearing about the chief from clients who knew him was honestly painful. My already heavy legs felt even heavier, but I still had a mountain of work left to do. I mustered up whatever energy I could and returned to the office.

“I’m back,” I said, but the room was empty.

“Welcome, Tabuchi.”

“Whoa! Oh, it’s you, Baba.”

“Sorry, I wasn’t trying to scare you.”

“No, I should be sorry myself. Is it just you here?”

Baba was the oldest employee in our department, close to retirement age, and he seemed to be the only one left. I missed him because he was standing in a blind spot, but I assumed everyone else had left to work away from the office. It was already night, so maybe that was more convenient for the clients. But that wasn’t what happened.

“Everyone went home.”

“They went home?!”

That couldn’t be. There were always four or five people working

late. That should have been especially true now that the chief was dead.

"The boss called us and said he was going straight home, so we discussed going home at the regular time. After what happened to Takebayashi, it seems like everyone's got things on their mind."

"I see."

"We decided to leave as much work for tomorrow as possible. It's going to be brutal no matter which day it's done on. Same as usual."

"I suppose."

"You're having a rough time, I'm sure. Go home. None of us are in any state to do good work. You're only going to make mistakes and give yourself more work to do if you try. I'll be heading home now too."

"All right."

Every word out of his mouth came as a warning, and all those warnings stayed with me. Next thing I knew, I was at my front door. Not only that, but I was holding a bag full of food from a convenience store. I didn't even remember buying it. I checked the bag and found a receipt from a taxi that was signed by Baba.

In any case, I wanted to change out of my clothes. I put the bag down and hung up my suit. When I first joined the company, I was told that leaving suits on a chair for too long would wrinkle them. At the time, I think I was being introduced to a clothes hanger that could be attached to the tops of chairs at the office.

The phone in my suit started to ring. Thinking someone might be mad at me for leaving work on time, I felt melancholic.

"Hello?"

"Kazuo?"

"Oh. So it's you, Mom."

"What's that supposed to mean? Is that any way to speak to your mother? Someone has to do the calling here, and it's never you calling me."

"What do you want?"

"Kazuo, I was talking to someone in the neighborhood yesterday, and I heard that some guy named Iguchi's become pretty infamous lately. He works for a company around here, and both him and his company have gone viral across the internet."

"So?"

"I asked what the company was called, and it had the same name as your company. I looked into it, and people say that place overworks its employees. Have you been having any issues there?"

"Well, I'm definitely busy. So I'm going to hang up now."

"Wait! Why don't you come home?"

"To what end?"

“We have a room available, and Yuji and his wife say they wouldn’t mind living with you. You can come home and take your time looking for a new job.”

“I’m good. I’ve got things to do here.”

“I heard about this site where anonymous employees can leave reviews of their former workplaces and had Yuji check it out. The more we learned, the more horrible your company sounded! At least come home before you work yourself to death! Your father feels bad about the way he did things back then. You don’t need to be so stubborn. Kazuo? Are you listening, Kazuo?”

“I told you, I’m busy,” I said, hanging up the phone. “You ask me to come home now, after all this time?”

I remembered what the chief said about families and how complicated they could be. It was when my mom called me during a lunch break, and he overheard me arguing with her. I confessed that I distanced myself from my family due to a poor relationship with my father, and he told me about his own problems with his own father. He looked bitter, but after that, he smiled again. I thought he told me something else, but couldn’t remember what it was. My brain wasn’t working anymore.

This was the right time for a drink. I went to my kitchen, a fairly cramped one, but big enough for a man living alone. I searched for a resealable bag of powder on the shelf. This was also something the chief taught me about. When I first joined the company, this was how we broke the ice. I thought he looked intimidating at the time and tried to avoid him, but he only looked scary. On the inside, he was a peaceful man. He was considerate enough to try and make me coffee while preparing his own drink. But instead of coffee, he accidentally made two of his own special drink. He apologetically asked if I wanted to drink it, and I figured I couldn’t refuse, but it ended up making me feel a lot better. It tasted like an unusual flavor of coffee.

Soon enough, I grew to like it. I asked what it was and where I could buy it, and he said he made it himself. It was a concoction devised by his ancestors, he claimed, but I thought it sounded ridiculous. That must have been apparent from the look on my face, because the chief bashfully tried to clear things up by talking about his family, even though I never asked. The more I heard, the more it sounded like something out of a light novel. I was surprised, but fascinated. I also came to learn about his interest in geek culture around this time, quickly helping us grow closer.

A month later, we were chatting all about our favorite light novels and games. After I learned about his interests, I began to suspect that everything he said about his family was made up, but we were such close friends that he went out of his way to prove it with a

demonstration.

I decided to drink his special beverage, but I only had a bit of the powder left. I had to use it all. It was hot and had a unique odor that somehow cleared my mind. Dandelion roots were the main ingredient, and it included mugwort and ginkgo leaves as well. There were around a dozen other types of herbs in there too. Supposedly, it improved the liver's functioning, cured anorexia, cured constipation, cured indigestion, worked as a diuretic, lowered cholesterol, improved mental health, reduced stress, worked as a nutritional supplement, and more. I didn't believe it at first, but now it felt like I was only able to keep working thanks to this drink.

I would especially need it for our party tomorrow. The chief used to share his with me, but that was in the past now. His stock should have still been at the office, but if it was gone, I knew how to make more. He didn't feel the need to keep it a secret, so after we got to know each other, he was happy to teach me. Whenever I asked him for some, he told me to make it myself, but then gave me more anyway. At least there was still a way for me to get this drink, but the man who always made it for me was no more. As my brain started up, the memories came back to me.

I had only used this kitchen to cook a few times. I never did housework until I moved from the countryside to the city, so my home life was horrible. I always ate out or had pre-made food at home, so the chief taught me how to cook some simple meals. He also taught me how to do everything from cleaning to dividing up my trash. After we got to know each other, we started to hang out away from work. I had often heard that city people hated when others interfered in their lives, but as someone from a rural area, I appreciated it. I was new to the city life, so he helped out a lot. More and more of these memories came back to me.

"And here I thought I'd be the one to die first... Why'd you have to go and die before me?!" I cried, my heart full of sorrow and futility.

Extra Story: The Ones Left Behind (Part 2)

The next day, as usual, I arrived at the office before the scheduled time. I went straight to go see Baba.

“Good morning.”

“Morning. Did you make it home all right yesterday? I was worried about you.”

“Yes, thanks for asking. Also, this is for you.”

“You brought the receipt for me? Thank you.”

“Wait, I thought you rode with me.”

“No, I had a bit of business to attend to, so I just got you in the taxi and paid the driver. Do you not remember?”

“I’m sorry, I have no memory of what happened before I got home. I had food from the convenience store that I don’t even remember buying.”

“I see. You did seem to be rather stupefied. We went to the convenience store after we left the office. By the way, Tabuchi, are you free tonight?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Baba said he wants to go out drinking tonight. Just between us.”

“I’m surprised to see you inviting us out for drinks, Baba.”

“I’m in the right mood for it. It’ll be a good chance to mourn Takebayashi, and there’s something I wanted to tell everyone. How about it?”

“The boss apparently won’t be coming to the office again. We should be able to leave on time.”

“Sounds good. We may as well take the opportunity to drink, then.”

Disregarding our work, we agreed to go out later that night.



“Cheers!”

Fifteen of us gathered at a bar we were trying for the first time. It was just about the only time we went drinking together without any problematic people present. Of course, we still found it somewhat hard to take it easy. I didn’t know what Baba suggested this outing for, and had to wonder what he wanted to discuss.

"Here you go, Tabuchi."

"Thank you," I muttered. I had a million questions, but Baba seemed to be waiting until everyone had their drinks.

"This stuff's delicious!"

"Seriously, this food's great."

"Right? I'm the one who recommended the place. Be sure to keep it a secret from the boss."

"So this is like your secret hideout, Baba?"

"Actually leaving work on time to go eat good food and drink good drinks? This is great!"

"We got to leave on time two days in a row. I think that's a first for me."

It was something that could normally never happen, but now there was nobody to stop us. I was excited by this precious opportunity, but I couldn't truly enjoy it. An uneasy air filled the room.

"If only the chief were here," said Hara, the youngest member of our department. Everyone else went quiet. "Oh, sorry!" the petite woman apologized, sensing that she said something rude. She bowed to everyone around her, almost bursting out of her tight clothes as she did.

"Don't worry about it. We're all thinking the same thing, right?"

"Pretty much."

"Baba's right, Hara."

"Anyone could die at any time, but I never thought it'd happen to the chief."

"Same."

"Me neither."

"I knew it was on everyone's mind."

"I don't remember the chief ever taking a day off except on the weekends."

"He even came in when he was supposed to get days off, actually."

"But he never once seemed tired or sick."

"Do you know how old he was, Tabuchi?"

"Thirty-nine."

"What?! He was still in his thirties?!"

"That's hard to believe."

"Speaking of which, when did Takebayashi join the company?"

"I joined seven years ago, and he was already here at that point. If anyone knows, I guess Baba would." Everyone's eyes turned to Baba.

"I don't know exactly when it was myself. I was reassigned to this department from the sales department."

"I never knew that."

“This was over a decade ago now. But he received a commendatory gift for fifteen years at the company last year, so I suppose he was on his sixteenth year.”

“Sixteen years at our company?”

“The guy couldn’t have been human.”

“But if he didn’t tolerate this company for sixteen years, maybe this wouldn’t have happened.” The room grew painfully silent.

“Oh, uh, what was it you wanted to talk about today?” I asked to try and change the subject. Baba thought for a moment.

“I wanted to talk about what’s next for us,” he said so solemnly that it made me tense. “What are everyone’s plans going forward?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you want to keep working for this company?” he asked. Nobody answered. “Takebayashi is gone. It’s extremely unfortunate, but you have to think about your own futures too. You don’t have to answer this question, but do you think you can tolerate working at this company without Takebayashi? I’ll be honest, I took advantage of his kindness and let him do some of my work. I used him to reduce my workload. That’s how I survived to be this age despite the trials of working in this department. Now that he’s gone, I don’t think I can take it anymore,” he admitted and looked around at the rest of the group. Everyone he looked at turned away. They had all come to the same conclusion. “So I have a proposal. Why don’t we all quit?”

“All of us?”

“Were it only so easy.”

I didn’t know what I was supposed to do then. I’d be out of a job, and it was hard to find a new one. We all tripped over each other voicing our objections, and he calmly accepted them all.

“Your concerns are understandable, but I actually found a new workplace already. For all of us,” he said, to our shock. “Like I said, I used to be in sales. I gave some old clients a visit, some I hadn’t been in contact with for ages, but they still remembered me. They were surprisingly easy to talk to.”

It was hard to believe, but Baba showed us a list of company names and contact information, as well as related business cards. He even had documents from some of the companies. I checked them once they were passed around to me, and if he was lying, he put a lot of effort into it.

“Of course, it would be impossible to get us all working in the same place, but plenty of them are happy to accept experienced engineers. I checked their conditions, and if they think you’re good enough, they’ll even consider paying better salaries and offering future promotions. Either way, you won’t end up in a worse position than you are right now. I think all these jobs should be tolerable. Best of

all, you'll never have to work during vacations unless absolutely necessary. You'll get paid overtime. Their rules about this are better than our current company."

"Seriously? I've heard of this company."

"They've been performing pretty well recently, haven't they?"

"I know about them too! They're supposed to have a gym and a nap room at the office, aren't they? And they make employee benefits a priority."

"These other companies have their good points too."

"What if they're just trying to make themselves look good?"

"I understand your suspicions, but regardless, it couldn't be worse than continuing to work at this company could it?"

"Well, I guess not."

Unable to believe how favorable these conditions were, Kumatani voiced his dissenting opinion, but later went silent. Everyone else was the same way. We were already at rock bottom, so there was nowhere to go but up. A chance for a better workplace and a better life had come before us. But I still didn't know what to do.

"Baba, may I ask something?"

"What, Tabuchi?"

"Why wait until now to do this?"

I knew Baba was busy at work too, and if he wanted to change jobs, he could have simply searched for himself. Maybe he just happened to find these jobs now, but I didn't see why Baba would look for jobs for all of us in the first place.

"It's hard to explain, but I suppose I feel like there's something to gain from this," he said. Everyone looked at him, somewhat confused. Baba looked down, his voice strained.

"Takebayashi asked me to take care of the rest of the department if anything happens to him."

"The chief said that?"

"A long time ago, but yes. I forgot about it until the other day. I hated Takebayashi."

That stirred everyone up even more. As far as I knew, they had always gotten along.

"It was only back then that I disliked him. Back when I was in the sales department, the upper brass went about some secret dealings, like looking after the child of an executive from one of our clients in exchange for work. I disapproved of their methods, so they transferred me to another department," Baba said self-derisively. "Takebayashi was the one who taught me everything I needed to know for my new job. My generation is all about seniority, so I took issue with working under a man younger than I was. I was ashamed, to be honest. I only paid attention to the bad things about him, so I grew to hate him even

more. All my frustration over my demotion was directed toward him. I never said so, but I think he noticed.

“Still, he persisted in teaching me. Some ten years after I learned to do the job on my own, I finally changed my mind. We were working overtime and I was frustrated, so I started lecturing Takebayashi, saying he didn’t know how to handle business and that’s why work always got pushed on him. When I think about it now, I was awfully cruel. But then he told me it was fine, that he knew everyone was busy, and that he had enough stamina to deal with it. He vaguely smiled, and no matter what I said, I couldn’t make him mad. Then I just said that it would hurt us all if he worked himself to death, trying to end the conversation.

“Then I said that as long as he was around, everything would work out. I expected him to retaliate after everything I said, but he just laughed. I could never get mad at him again after that.”

“The chief was never one to hold a grudge.”

“Even when you bugged him, yeah.”

“I was worried it would be the opposite. I thought he might actually be angry.”

“I can see why. He wasn’t always the best at communicating.”

We went silent for a while, but it was a more peaceful silence than before.

“I’m sure he forgot what he told me, but I still wanted to do what I could.”

Thinking about it logically, it was nearly impossible to improve the company. That was why Baba went as far as finding new workplaces for all of us and suggesting that we quit.

“I want everyone to consider it. Do you want the company to keep abusing you, or do you want to take a risk with a new workplace? I won’t make you do anything. Make a choice that you won’t regret, but I at least wanted to provide you with a chance,” Baba said, then stood up and bowed. He came across like someone on an apology tour, but I understood how he felt. At the same time, hope for the future was in sight.

“Thank you, Baba!”

“A toast to Baba and the chief!”

It wasn’t long before everyone applauded and cheered.

Afterword

Hello, this is Roy, writer of *By the Grace of the Gods*! Thank you for purchasing Volume 3! I've gotten three books published now, and there's even a manga version of my story running at the same time. To my surprise, I've even been getting fan letters lately! I know this doesn't reflect well on me as a writer, but I can't find the words to express how happy I am. Honestly, I never thought I'd get fan letters. I'm sure many of you know this, but *By the Grace of the Gods* was originally published on Hina Project's website, Shousetsuka ni Narou. I still use my account there. The site has many functions that can be used for free, including a means of sending messages and posting impressions directly, so I only expected people to do that (and there are plenty of comments that I appreciate). But some people are even taking the time to write a letter and pay the postage cost to send it. That gives me a whole new level of happiness. It warms my heart. Of course, I'm glad to receive messages on the site as well, but physical letters certainly feel a bit different. Thank you so much for all your support, everyone! I'll keep writing the best story I can, so I hope you'll continue to support me in the future.

Bonus Short Stories

Serge and the Twins

“You may use this room for a while. Your luggage will be brought to you.”

“Thank you.”

After Bamboo Forest’s opening party came to an end, the invitees left by foot or carriage. The twins had only just arrived in Gimul and had no home as of yet, so Serge led them to a guest room. Before he left, he asked them a question.

“How does this store look? What do you think about the boss?”

“To be honest, I would say they’re odd. Both the store and its owner,” Carla responded.

“It’s a fine store, it seems like it will be simple enough to run, and the food is delicious. There’s something unique about it all. That includes the manager.”

“I get that. When I was first introduced to him, I thought the same thing. I still feel the same way now.”

“Just who *is* he? He seems to be on good terms with the duke’s family and many high-ranking adventurers, but he said he wasn’t a noble.”

“Judging from his conversations, he’s fairly educated. Is he the son of some affluent merchant?”

“I met him through an introduction from the duke’s family. His grandmother was an intellectual with a love of education, apparently, but he seemed to have lived a difficult life. Ever since his grandparents passed away three years ago, he became frustrated with people and hid away deep in a forest.”

When the twins heard that, they were surprised and dubious. “He didn’t look that misanthropic to me.”

“I agree with Carla. He seemed very sociable, if anything.”

“I don’t understand it either. Maybe his wounded heart has healed, or maybe he got tired of a life of solitude. In any case, I want you to watch him closely.” Serge paused for a moment. “But that doesn’t mean I want you to investigate him. There’s no need to leak any information you learn through working with him, nor do you need to take any action to benefit my company. I only ask that you assist him. He can even do things that would be advantageous to my company, as long as it’s legal and helpful for his business.”

“Are you sure?” the twins asked in unison.

“It’s hard to keep a business going without getting dirty sometimes. Remember to always work with him in good faith. In his case, I think accommodating his passions would be ideal,” Serge said and told the twins everything he knew.

“He isn’t concerned with money or fame, then?”

“He only decided to start a business after someone else suggested it to him.”

“After the guildmaster first met him, she said that he seemed like he might up and leave at any moment, but I want him to stay in this city. That’s partially at the request of the duke’s family, but I also have some personal interest in the boy. Staying on good terms with him could lead to profit down the line, of course. I’m sure you recognize that,” Serge said. The twins didn’t hesitate to nod.

“I did say he was odd, but if he has a unique perspective, then I’m sure there’s plenty to learn from him,” Carla answered.

“And from what I saw at the party, he has incredible knowledge and great connections. Knowledge and connections are the lifeblood of a merchant,” Carme added. Serge was satisfied by their responses.

“He at least knows he’s an amateur when it comes to business, and he’s been happy to ask for my input on plenty of occasions. Just tell him if any of his suggestions have issues, and he should understand. In the event that he ignores your advice and his business declines, I promise that my company will hire you again. Don’t worry about the future, just work for him earnestly and see what there is to be learned.”

“Thank you for giving us this opportunity,” the twins said. With renewed determination, they began work at Ryoma’s store the following day.

The Reality of Research Jobs

“What was the monster research lab like?” Jane asked the three ex-researchers one day after work, when all the employees were chatting over dinner.

“Oh, are you interested in research? Or just monsters?”

“Both! I’m not that smart, though, so I’m really fascinated by scientists!”

“Ahaha, well, don’t get too excited.”

“I think we’ll disappoint you, but ask whatever you like.”

“Thanks!”

Caulkin, Tony, and Lobelia sat with the fascinated girl.

“But where should we start?”

“Can you tell me how you become a researcher?”

“That’s simple. You just need to be employed by a research facility. They hire sometimes, and if you have a teacher they can offer a recommendation. You can also personally visit a laboratory and negotiate for them to recruit you.”

“They’ll usually have some conditions for new applicants. For example, the Royal Monster Laboratory that I used to work at only hired people who earned high enough grades from an academy in the capital. You also have to pass a test on monster studies, then go through an interview process.”

“Once you’re hired, you’ll usually be assigned to some laboratory somewhere and start as an assistant to a more experienced researcher.”

When Maria heard these answers, she had her own question to ask. “What do you do if you’re not part of a laboratory? You and the boss aren’t associated with any labs, are you?”

“You’re a sharp one. We still do research, but we aren’t officially recognized as researchers. We’re treated as self-proclaimed researchers, so to speak. If we wanted to present the results of our research, we would have to personally submit a thesis to a research facility or have it judged by several different guilds. Our work is almost never viewed favorably, though,” Caulkin said, and the three ex-researchers’ expressions clouded.

“Why’s that?”

“They have a lot of pride. In a bad way.”

“You see, research tends to cost money. Research facilities dump tons of money into paying for workers and materials. You don’t want researchers from outside your facility to get results, because that may mean losing funding to someone else.”

“And if those results come from a researcher affiliated with no laboratory, it puts the laboratories in a bad light. They’ll always be pressured to meticulously look for flaws in our work. They have powerful people in charge.”

“Huh, so researchers with no laboratory don’t have any opportunities for success?” Jane asked. When she heard about the reality of research jobs, she frowned over how unfair it sounded.

“When you publicize your results, it’s always possible that a research facility will seek to recruit you. But like any organization, laboratories have hierarchies and factions, so joining a laboratory doesn’t necessarily mean upward mobility. In fact, the struggle only gets worse from there.”

“You’ll still get the same meticulous criticism and pressure as before, and any objections are considered complaints about the boss. Low level employees can’t point out mistakes without earning someone’s ire. The boss may also pass off your research as their own.

Everyone's always trying to get in everyone else's way too."

"They even say that you need to be part of a faction to get anywhere as a researcher. You either need connections with powerful people, or the political talent to navigate those tumultuous seas. Your research itself is the second or third priority. That's the truth about low level researchers. Maybe it's different if you manage to advance through the ranks, but we couldn't tell you about that," Caulkin said self-derisively, then laughed. "Nowadays, I question why I was ever so obsessed with that place. I was able to get food and a home here. I can earn enough to fund my research too. I don't even have to waste my free time on meaningless power struggles."

"I feel that! That place was suffocating. This new job is relaxing by comparison, and the boss actually listens to us."

"I can focus on my research much more here than I did there. It's kind of strange."

The three researchers agreed and laughed, enjoying the food and conversation. The day ended peacefully.

Behind the Scenes of the Second Set of Hires

"You're the girls who came from Weizen?"

"Yes!" the three young girls shouted. They were in a room at the merchant's guild, gathered before the guildmaster. The girls were working for their living expenses while they studied and searched for more permanent jobs, when they were abruptly summoned by the guildmaster herself. They couldn't hide their distress, but they tried to act natural.

"I'm not going to scold you or anything, calm down."

"I see," Fina said with a sigh of relief.

"I'll give you the full details when one more person arrives, but I wanted to talk about a job. The manager of a store is looking for some new hires. Sorry, but you'll have to wait a bit longer."

"Hey, Fina, is the guildmaster supposed to do this stuff personally?"

"Normally it would be handled by the appropriate department, but this manager happens to be someone I know," the guildmaster answered when she heard Jane whisper.

"Oh, thank you."

"Jane..."

After the guildmaster responded, she started to silently stare at the girl's face.

"Um, what is it?"

"You seem all right. You look loyal, and I think you'd have some fine intuition."

“Intuition?”

“Yeah! You’re not that smart, Jane, but you have better intuition than anyone!”

“Maria?!”

The last of the girls interjected to agree with the guildmaster’s impressions, making her two friends freeze up.

“Haha, now this girl’s a bold one,” Glissela laughed

“Excuse me,” Chelma the chef said as she entered the tense room. They were then given the full details, and all four of them decided to work at Ryoma’s store.

“Then I’ll need to have you go through the rest of the formalities with the manager. Jane, Fina.”

“Yes?!”

“Jane, you’re best off following your feelings, and Fina, you prefer to use your head. Maria’s the sort who can keep her composure in any situation. New workplaces bring new struggles, so make use of your strengths to help each other through it.”

“OK!” they said.

“You help them too, Chelma. These girls have never worked in the city before.”

“Understood. It’s almost like I’ve gotten myself some daughters.”

After that exchange, they met with their new employer.



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by Roy

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Edited by Nathan Redmond

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